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**THE AESTHETICS OF NEGATIVITY  
THE CINEMA OF SUZUKI SEIJUN**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I confirm that the material contained within is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university, nor has it been published in any other form.

WORD COUNT: 87964

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

The following abbreviations, generally standard in academic film studies, are used throughout the body of this thesis. This list does not include standard academic abbreviations that occur in the accompanying reference material.

CU Close-up shot

Fig. Figure

LS Long Shot

MS Medium Shot

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the films of post-war Japanese director Suzuki Seijun (1923-), who has yet to be the subject of an extended study in the English language. The thesis aims to provide a close textual analysis of several of Suzuki's films, with an emphasis on his crime and gangster films of the 1960s. At the same time, it aims to discuss and determine the significance of these films, and the consistent stylistic features that emerge from them, in multiple historical, ideological, and theoretical contexts. For example, while the thesis emphasises the importance of Suzuki's films to formal and ideological developments in Japanese cinema from 1950s to the present day, it also claims significance to these films in reference to major issues in contemporary film theory, such as modernity, genre, masculinity, identification, reflexivity, violence, spectatorship, and masochism.

The thesis begins by claiming that a 'differential aesthetic' is evident in Suzuki's films, defined by a variety of textual features such as editing discontinuities, non-diegetic colours, graphics, and theatrical effects, repetitive structures of narration, and inter-textual references. Such features were highly unconventional, and in many cases deemed unacceptable, in the context of Japanese studio genre production in the 1960s. The rest of the thesis proposes to fully explore this 'Suzuki difference' in a variety of historical and theoretical contexts. I have chosen the concept of negativity and the 'negative aesthetic' to unify the thesis as a whole, arguing that the Suzuki aesthetic is not merely differential, but attempts a negation of formal and ideological conventions of studio filmmaking for the purpose of a wide-ranging, satirical critique of post-war Japanese culture. In several respects, the negative aesthetic links Suzuki to global tendencies in the transformation of cinematic form and narration in the 1960s, and his films can contribute to an understanding of these transitions.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1963, Suzuki Seijun was a middle-aged, lower-ranking, critically unrecognised contract director at Nikkatsu studios, despite the fact that he had already made twenty program pictures. Forty years later, in 2003, the octogenarian Suzuki was still directing films long after the economic collapse of the Japanese studio system; he had won every major Japanese film award and many international awards; and the most prominent directors of the 1990s throughout Japan, East Asia, and the English-speaking world were citing him as an important influence, including Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Miike Takashi, Aoyama Shinji, John Woo, Kar-Wai Wong, Jim Jarmusch, Quentin Tarantino, and Baz Luhrmann.<sup>1</sup> How did the career of this director, who was fired from his own studio and blacklisted by the entire studio system in the late 1960s, outlast by decades the careers of major contemporaries at Nikkatsu and other studios? How did his influence on filmmaking practice arguably come to be more significant than that of highly publicized directors of the *nuberu bagu* (the Japanese New Wave) such as Ōshima Nagisa or Yoshida Yoshishige? Why did it take Japanese film criticism so long to recognize this powerful strain of influence, and why does it remain so underrepresented in film studies today?

The extraordinary circumstances and conditions of this rise to artistic prominence, revealing as it does the upheavals of the Japanese film industry since 1960, is self-evidently a worthy subject of historical scholarship. However, this thesis is an analytical and cultural study that proposes slightly different questions of this remarkable body of

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<sup>1</sup> *Style to kill: Koroshi no rakuin visual directory* (Tokyo: Puchi gura paburissingu, 2001), pp. A17-A26; Stephen Teo, 'Seijun Suzuki: Authority in Minority,' *Senses of Cinema* 8 (July-August 2000), <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/festivals/00/8/miff/suzuki.html>; Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006), p. 312; Gerald Peary, ed., *Quentin Tarantino: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi, 2013), pp. 123-4; Logan Hill, 'Even Tarantino Was Shocked,' *The Telegraph* (12 Feb 2006).

work. What makes Suzuki's films so different from those of his contemporaries—including his top-ranking rival Imamura Shōhei, his own mentor Noguchi Hiroshi and his many successful apprentices such as Hasebe Yasuharu—that they have wielded such an influence and given rise to cultural scandal? And what, most importantly, is the historical and conceptual significance of a narrative film director who boldly asserted that 'time and space are nonsense in my films.'<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis I shall assert and attempt to define the formal and ideological contours of a filmmaking practice that I call the 'Suzuki Difference,' an authorial signature that actively seeks to differentiate itself from both dominant filmmaking practices and ideologies (the Japanese studio system) and received counter-practices, such as the documentary-like aesthetics of the *nuberu bagu* as conditioned by the politics of the Japanese New Left of the 1960s.

One could define the Suzuki Difference aesthetically by a list of formal devices which were unconventional, indeed unacceptable to the studio system in which Suzuki presented them: discontinuous editing and narratively dysfunctional ellipses, non-synchronous sound and visuals, pervasive non-diegetic lighting and colouration; non-diegetic graphics and inserts, flat theatrical backgrounds, etc. And it is, indeed, important to observe each of these devices in the historical context of the 1960s: of gradual, often resisted, formal and ideological evolution, both within the Japanese film industry and transnationally. Many of these devices were also used between 1959-1960 by younger contemporaries such as Masumura Yasuzō, Ōshima Nagisa, and Jean-Luc Godard. In most cases Suzuki's experiments pre-dated these, but what is important is not simply a formal/stylistic precedent, but the conceptual or critical use to which it is put. It is the rich complexity of his critical signature that differentiates Suzuki from Japanese studio

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<sup>2</sup> Suzuki interview by Tom Mes for the website Midnight Eye (11 October, 2001), <http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/seijun-suzuki/>.



directors of the 1970s who followed his lead in applying a larger range of formal devices to narrative film. As I shall argue, Suzuki presents, necessarily within the idiom of popular genre filmmaking, an alternate cinematic form as a politics of the image, a critical riposte to the workings of patriarchy and social control in popular film.

In this, as Donald Richie recognized, Suzuki is similar to his associate Ōshima.<sup>3</sup> But whereas Ōshima's films amounted to a Brechtian theatre of gesture towards the political and formal debates of his day, Suzuki's political sense of form compelled him to evade interpretation, even to militate against signification itself. Suzuki is not politically 'progressive' or constructive: he does not set out a programme for cultural reform; his films do not participate *directly* in political debates of the time, nor do they propose a direction for revolutionary action. In fact, Suzuki most often dwells on the failure of rebellion, by those who are caught in the ideological system against which they struggle. While Ōshima represented (often critically) the political Left, Suzuki examined the long Japanese tradition of rebellion from the right—of reactionary subjectivity. Because of his subject matter and popular (generic) idiom, it has been too easy for critics to dismiss his political analysis, discoverable only through metaphor and other open-ended forms, as retrograde or non-existent. But we can appreciate Suzuki in light of a politics of the image such as that advanced by Jacques Rivette—among the most politically active of the French *nouvelle vague* directors—in 1969:

I don't believe in a revolutionary cinema...which is satisfied with taking the revolution as its subject...The only way to make revolutionary cinema in France is to make sure that it escapes all the bourgeois aesthetic clichés.... I believe more and more that the role of the cinema is to destroy myths, to be pessimistic. Its role is to take people out of their cocoons and plunge them into horror.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Cinema* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> Rivette, 'Time Overflowing' (September 1968), translated in *Cahiers du Cinéma 1960-1968*, edited by Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), p. 321.

Suzuki is pessimistic rather than constructive: he sees the latter orientation as a trap of power. He therefore takes negation as an ethical ‘first principle’ beyond mere aesthetic iconoclasm. Suzuki has described his practice as a form of nihilism, but it is best described as a negative aesthetic, socially, critically, and reflexively:

When Chuson-ji, the famous Buddhist temple...was still standing, travellers would simply pass it by....They only began to notice it...after it was in ruins. What is standing now isn't really there. When it is demolished, the consciousness that it...was there begins to form. Thus, even in terms of...civilization, the power of destruction is stronger.<sup>5</sup>

What is negation, for Suzuki? On the one hand, it is not a Sadian negation, which abhors and violates nature in the name of reason.<sup>6</sup> On the other, it can neither be perfectly identified with nor entirely separated from Freudian negation, which is a form of disavowal, a looking away from an intolerable reality. Suzuki's films, considered as a social/aesthetic practice, do not disavow: they actively reject. They deliberately ‘make false’ not reality *per se*, but the consensual/conventional realities that mask that reality. Like Kurosawa at his boldest, Suzuki looks—with a certain masochistic pride in *not* looking away. But if Suzuki does not look away, neither does he seek to merely represent an extra-cinematic reality: he actively recognises the camera's transformation of reality into image. If Deleuze is correct to argue that Freudian disavowal, as the basis of fetishism, consists in ‘radically contesting the validity of that which is[.]...suspend[ing] belief in and neutraliz[ing] the given in such a way that new horizons open up...’, then there is clearly a relation to Suzuki's sensual, dream-like, artificial *mise-en-scène*. According to Deleuze, the author Sacher von Masoch wishes ‘to put on wings and escape into the world of dreams...He does not believe in negating or destroying the world nor in idealizing it: what he does is disavow it...He questions the

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<sup>5</sup> *Shinema* '69 (no. 2), translated by Gregory Barrett in Satō Tadao, *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), p. 224.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, translated by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 27-29.

validity of existing reality in order to create a pure ideal reality.’<sup>7</sup> Suzuki’s cinema is correspondingly dreamlike, to be sure, but these are dreams, like Hitchcock’s, of terror and murder, of intolerable oppression and largely futile rebellion. They are also, often, beautiful. Suzuki’s negativity then, is a complex operation by which the intolerable truths of society are represented, but are seen, in the cinema, as within a dream. What are these truths? As a war veteran, Suzuki continually returned to the institutional expression of violence as a fundamental yet intolerable condition of social organisation. For Suzuki, the monopoly on the means of violence by governing institutions in Japan (for example, during the Tokugawa and Meiji Restorations or the U.S. Occupation) did not permit a greater degree of peace or freedom for its ‘subjects’ than other social structures or, indeed, anarchy, might have done. Rather, institutional power at once suppresses and exploits the (irrational) violence of the individual in order to wield and justify violence as social control. War, capitalist exploitation, gang life, and other social phenomena even permit the institution to unleash a near-universal annihilation of its subjects in the name of that control. For Suzuki, this ‘hidden’ truth of annihilation underpinning all ‘civil’ society—including, polemically, that of post-war, capitalist Japan—must be continually revealed.

If, as Deleuze argues, a dream-like aesthetic is a form of artistic resistance, then Suzuki uses such a cinema not to construct (false) utopias, but to ‘re-present’ the truth of violence and oppression in a form that is transmuted by art,<sup>8</sup> a modernist and reflexive form that rejects all aesthetics of realism and distances itself from the signified. Violence as abstract art can be tolerated and indeed can, and perhaps must, become a source of

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze, pp. 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, adapting Deleuze’s account of disavowal in art, remarks that ‘paradoxically, the structure of disavowal guarantees a continual, suspended acknowledgement of the very thing denied.’ Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 93.

masochistic pleasure. For if not, then where shall those pleasures be found that do not delude us in the service of power?

The specific contours of this negative aesthetic practice—a dynamic and relational negativity, a response to its times—shall be revealed, subsequently, through close textual analysis.<sup>9</sup> Although this thesis analyses several representative films of Suzuki in chronological order, I have also arranged my study so that each chapter invokes a distinct set of theoretical, critical, and cultural frameworks by which to interpret Suzuki and appreciate his difference. Chapter One, on methodology, lays out the many theoretical contexts and assumptions that I have invoked, and sketches the nature of Suzuki criticism up to this point. Chapter Two provides a brief history of the film career of Suzuki and its critical reception. Chapter Three, treating the films of 1956-1962, focuses on the Japanese adaptation of Hollywood genres and stylistic norms, including the aesthetics of colour. Chapter Four (1963) discusses the sexual politics of studio genre films and, above this, the politics of representation. Chapter Five (1963-65) examines the formal and political context of the vast post-war genre of *yakuza* films. Chapter Six (1964-66) relates Suzuki's representation of war to the representation of the body, revealing a masochistic aesthetic that determines both. Chapter Seven examines discontinuity, iconic style, and other formal strategies in relation to a social critique of post-war and pre-war masculine identity. Chapter Eight uses the film theory of Deleuze to place Suzuki's use of discontinuity and other 'negative' formal devices in a transnational context of cinematic evolution in the 1960s. Finally, Chapter Nine examines the re-appropriation of pre-war Japanese art—specifically, gothic literature and classical theatre—in Suzuki's creation of a new 'dream image' within an overall cinema of abject pleasure.

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<sup>9</sup> It is strongly recommended that readers who are not familiar with Suzuki's films consult the plot summaries given in the Appendix before proceeding to the analytical chapters.

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## A NOTE ON THE TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

In this thesis Japanese names are given in the order of surname first and personal name second, as per Japanese custom. In the case of film titles, I have given the Japanese name first, followed by an English translation. I have made an exception of the film *Zigeunerweisen* and used the original German title of the musical composition by Pablo de Sarasate after which the film takes its name. The Japanese title, which has been romanized in some sources as *Tsigoineruwaizen*, is simply the Japanese syllabic transliteration of the original German.

At this time of writing there are no recognised standard English titles for Suzuki's films, but instead a large number of variants attached to various theatrical and video releases in different markets. Literature on Suzuki in English has seen a similarly bewildering proliferation of variants. I have thus taken the liberty of deciding upon and offering the best translation possible, rather than being bound to any one of these variant release titles (which are provided in the Appendix at the end of this thesis).

All translations from Japanese sources are mine unless otherwise stated in references. One exception is the translation of film dialogue. In the case of films available on DVD in the U.S., I have used, for reasons of accessibility, the translations given on the DVD.<sup>10</sup>

As for the romanization of Japanese words, I have followed the Revised Hepburn System of Romanization which notably represents long vowels by the use of macrons (for example, ō and ū). Exceptions have been made for the extremely common place names, Tokyo and Osaka, and for multinational corporations, such as Kodansha Ltd., that are officially romanized without a marker of long vowels.

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<sup>10</sup> The choice of the United States as the locus of DVD availability is not arbitrary in the case of Suzuki. A large number are available in the U.S., in subtitled editions, that are not available in the U.K., and there is only one instance of the reverse case: *Kutabare gurentai/Fighting Delinquents!* (1960) is available in the U.K. from Yume pictures, but not in the U.S.

## CHAPTER ONE: SUZUKI AND FILM STUDIES

### *Introduction*

In my introduction I have argued that there is a ‘Suzuki Difference.’ How did this ‘difference’ develop, and under what conditions? What is its nature and significance? What is Suzuki’s place within both the scholarly narrative of Japanese film history and the transnational meta-narrative of cinematic form and narration in the 1960s?

My method relies on a visual and narrational analysis of key films selected from Suzuki’s 53 directorial features. This approach places special emphasis on stylistic or formal gestures which I have found to be ‘impertinent’ or ‘unconventional’ in regards to (a) the stylistic and structural norms of studio filmmaking, (b) the narrative and formal economy of a given film (its intrinsic norms) and (c) the generic expectations held by viewers on the basis of similar contemporary films.

Such ‘unconventional’ stylistic gestures reveal and define the critical and ideological signature of Suzuki as author within the context of post-war studio production at Nikkatsu. Suzuki was a director of modestly budgeted ‘B’ features at a low level of studio hierarchy, often not in control of the scripts and stars assigned to him. Therefore, mise-en-scène, editing, and stylistic gesture can often be a surer guide to authorial disposition than narrative events and dialogue. There is ample justification in film theory for this view, not only from French journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which in the 1960s located authorial agency within the Hollywood studio system in the ‘structured absences’ and formal ‘tensions’ within a given film,<sup>1</sup> but also from systematic accounts of filmic narration such as David Bordwell’s 1985 work *Narration in the Fiction Film*. According to Bordwell:

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, ‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,’ translated in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, Volume I (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1976), pp. 22-30; The Editors of *Cahiers du cinéma*, ‘John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*’ in Nichols, pp. 493-528.

...A film's stylistic patterning splits away from the *syuzhet* [i.e. the systematic organization of narrative events] when only artistic motivation can account for it. That is, if the viewer cannot adequately justify the stylistic work as necessary for some conception of realism, for transtextual ends such as genre, or for compositional requirements, then he or she must take style as present for its own sake, aiming to become palpable as such.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows I treat such stylistic evidence of 'artistic motivation' or 'style for its own sake' as characteristic of and characterizing authorial agency within a studio system that mandated certain types of narrative, narration, and stylistic norms.

The next step of my method, therefore, is to define as fully as possible the critical and ideological disposition of this authorial signature. Suzuki's films conceptualize aesthetic practice and ethical/political practice in the world according to what I would term 'negativity'. That is, Suzuki seeks to identify the wrong path in aesthetics as in ethical life, and only by that limited means points its viewers toward viable alternatives.

My thesis will relate this authorial practice to various relevant aesthetic and intellectual contexts, both Japanese and transnational. Detailed attention to historical developments in film practice is crucial here: in this time of rapid change to Japanese film aesthetics and industry, what was unconventional for a studio production in 1963 was not necessarily unconventional for 1966. Through frequent comparisons with contemporary filmmakers, including Nikkatsu directors like Kurahara Koreyoshi and Imamura Shōhei, leaders of the Japanese *nuberu bagu* (New Wave) like Ōshima Nagisa, and leading lights of European art cinema (Buñuel, Godard) I shall attempt to establish a critical basis from which we can re-evaluate Suzuki's significance in film history as one of not merely a cult genre director, but a conceptual innovator.

The task of the remainder of this chapter is to present a brief justification of the methods used in this thesis through dialogue with prior scholarly works on matters of film theory and method including critical concepts such as authorship, style, classicism,

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<sup>2</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 280. I have bracketed the fact that my equation of what Bordwell calls artistic motivation and authorial agency does not correspond exactly to Bordwell's own rather ambivalent view of cinematic authorship.

ideology, masculinity, masochism, and the cinematic representation of time. Secondly, I shall analyse some few milestones in the spare history of Suzuki criticism in order to demonstrate how this is a critical terrain that has yet to be mapped, and to suggest in what direction we must proceed.

## I. METHODOLOGIES

### *What Do We Mean by 'Film Author'?*

In this section I put forward some operative assumptions about cinematic authorship and its place in the context of the Japanese studio system. I elaborate my position by reference to three much-debated aspects of authorship: intentionality, the question of collaboration, and the 'author function' of a text.

My focus on authorial intentionality need not limit me to the expressed thoughts and actions of the biographical personage Suzuki Seijun. I subscribe to a generous definition of authorial agency that views every camera movement, every choice of angle, every set arrangement, as expressing the intention of the filmmakers, even if that intention turns out to be an 'unthinking' adherence to convention for lack of time or imagination: the 'unthinking' remains only a metaphor.<sup>3</sup>

The fact remains, however, that film is a collaborative medium: in the vast majority of cases, one cannot be certain whether the angle of the camera, the distance and duration of camera movement, the colours and arrangement of the set, or the duration of a cut was the product of the intentionality of the director, the cinematographer, the set designer, the editor, etc. Any such choices may be the product of one creator or the product of the negotiation between two or more of them. Despite

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<sup>3</sup> This view bypasses the unsustainable binary between *auteur* and *metteur-en-scène* often used by the *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and basically upheld by Peter Wollen in his *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, expanded edition (London: BFI, 1997), pp. 115-116. It could be said that all films are authored (some jointly), but that the application of authorial readings to some, as Wollen agrees, 'is wasted and unproductive.'



problems of memory and subjectivity, therefore, auxiliary information about films (interviews, recollections) acquires importance as an evidentiary basis for determining which aesthetic choices belonged to which aesthetic collaborator; but it is rarely comprehensive. At best, and in the absence of evidence to the contrary (studio interference etc.), we can view the director as *endorsing* and incorporating everything we see on the screen. There are exceptions in the case of certain historical modes of production: for example, the non-directorial provenance of scripts at Nikkatsu. In Film Studies, convincing arguments have been made by proponents of the director-as-sole-author who has ‘sufficient control’ over the film’s creative elements<sup>4</sup> and the multiple-author view which argues that we must acknowledge the ‘significant difference’ produced by major ‘artistic collaborators’ including actors.<sup>5</sup> By using the notion of *endorsement* of the director as primary but not sole author, I have retained a director-centred concept of *auteurism* that incorporates collaboration more than the conductorial ‘sense of direction’ that V.F. Perkins emphasizes,<sup>6</sup> and certainly more so than Peter Wollen’s rather dogmatic *auteur* structuralism, which describes the creative contributions of others as ‘noise’ and mere ‘contingency,’ an ‘impoverishment and confusion’ through which a resultant film text becomes ‘inaccessible to criticism’.<sup>7</sup> In other words, I mean to synthesize two legitimate responses to a question (What do we mean by the ‘film author’?) that may never be satisfactorily answered.

In what follows, then, I take the Suzuki signature as in fact a collaborative signature, a notion that is particularly well-suited to the *kumi* system of the Japanese studios in which the director would work with the same collaborators from film to film. Thus the intentionality and signature I label as ‘Suzuki’ from here on should be

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<sup>4</sup> V.F. Perkins, *Film as Art* (London: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> Berys Gaut, ‘Film Authorship and Collaboration’ in R. Allen and M. Smith, eds., *Film Theory and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 158

<sup>6</sup> Perkins, ‘Moments of Choice,’ *Rouge* [online journal] vol. 9 (2006), <http://www.rouge.com.au/9/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, pp. 70- 71.

understood as the *directorial endorsement* of a collaborative agency forged by the director and significant creative collaborators such as cinematographers Nagatsuka Kazue and Shigeyoshi Mine, production designer Kimura Takeo, editor Suzuki Akira, a host of regular actors and assistant directors like Yamatoya Atsushi.

Aaron Meskin has asked in a recent article, ‘Is the attribution of individual cinematic style (e.g. Kurosawa’s style) concerned with the actual director’s personality or character, or rather, the personality of the implied author (Kurosawa as he appears from the evidence of the film or body of films)?’<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, I have found it methodologically necessary to distinguish ‘the author as empirical origin...from the author as effect of the text’.<sup>9</sup> What I seek in the Suzuki signature is, then, the proverbial author-in-the-text, a ‘reel world’ authorial inscription which in the ‘real world’ is almost always the composite of interacting artistic intentionalities, some unconscious, many not. My use of the ‘author function’ basically corresponds to the structural qualities that Foucault attached to it, and even concedes to Foucault that ‘the author’ may function in culture to ‘restrict the dangerous proliferation of signification’. But this does not mitigate the importance, indeed necessity, of mapping particular authorial signatures in a culture that values them. Some signatures can even work against the signifying limitations that Foucault decried.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in speaking henceforth of ‘authorship’ I am designating a composite (yet potentially contradictory) ‘authorial function’ named Suzuki that exists within the text. If we knew nothing about the biographical Suzuki, we would still be able to say a great deal about the disposition of the ‘author’ as evident in the choices manifest in his

<sup>8</sup> Meskin, ‘Authorship,’ in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Six Authors in Pursuit of *The Searchers*’ in J. Caughie, ed. *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> ‘What is an Author?’ (February 1969), translated by Josué V. Harari in Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1998), pp. 221-2. At this point in the evolution of our digital culture I do not see, with Foucault, the polemical value of replacing the author function with whatever structure of signifying constraint that—as Foucault himself predicts—is bound to come after.

films. To a certain extent this level of textual agency, which is a matter of interpretation, corresponds to the ‘implied author’ of much prior literary and film theory—for instance Christian Metz’s location of authorship in a film’s *énonciation*.<sup>11</sup> But I shall use Bordwell’s *Narration in the Fiction Film* in order to situate my sense of the ‘author function’ within or between certain historical modes of practice. Bordwell seems to equate the ‘implied author’ with an ‘implied narrator’ and rejects the notion that all films have an implied narrator; instead, he argues that only some films construct a narrator through rhetorical and narrational devices.<sup>12</sup> For Bordwell, such cues are provided by the European Art Cinema, whose modes of production and reception construct an *auteur* as a ‘real-world parallel to the narrational presence “who” communicates and “who” expresses.’<sup>13</sup> This ‘concept of the author has a formal function it did not possess in the Hollywood studio system.’<sup>14</sup> It is important, perhaps even crucial to our argument to show why Bordwell’s distinction between Hollywood (classical) authorship and the 1960s ‘art cinema’ cannot be dogmatically applied to the case of Suzuki. In fact, my thesis seeks to apply exactly that critical practice to Suzuki that Bordwell applies to European art cinema:

Whenever confronted with a problem in causality, time, or space, we tend to seek realistic motivation....If we are thwarted, we appeal to the narration and perhaps...to the author. Is the narrator violating the norm to achieve a specific effect?...What thematic significance justifies the deviation? What range of judgmental connotations or symbolic meanings can be produced from this point or pattern?’

As I shall argue subsequently, there is considerable historical justification for taking this approach to a studio B-movie ‘*auteur*’ like Suzuki. Suzuki made what I call his ‘mature’ studio films from 1963-1967 during the protracted collapse of the studio system and concurrently with the Japanese *nuberu bagu* dominated by his former

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<sup>11</sup> Francesco Casetti, ‘Christian Metz’ in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, pp. 394-5.

<sup>12</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 209-211.

<sup>14</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 211.

colleagues from Shōchiku (Ōshima, Yoshida, Shinoda, Imamura) with whom the young directors at Nikkatsu (Kurahara, Nakahira) attempted to compete in stylistic innovation. Due to the media prominence of the *nuberu bagu* and a shrinking audience of mainly young men, the studio system gradually accepted stylistic change to the extent that, by 1968-9, even formulaic entertainment like *Gojira tai Hedorah/ Godzilla versus the Smog Monster* (Tōhō, 1969) operated according to stylistic parameters that would have been unthinkable in 1966. Suzuki was part of this process of ‘acceptance’ and, indeed, was in the vanguard of it; because of his notorious dismissal from Nikkatsu, he was also the great ‘boundary case’ by which the studio system’s aesthetic/ideological tolerance was tested. Even transnationally, Suzuki often anticipated even Godard in his creation of significant causal and spatial ‘gaps’ through editing and non-diegetic stylization. In such a context, we cannot use a hard and fast distinction of studio and ‘art cinema’ (such as Bordwell’s) either to limit or expand Suzuki’s authorship *a priori*. This is an authorial space that has yet to be defined, and only through extensive textual analysis.

### *Style and Excess*

How do we define unconventional style or elements of style in cinematic practice? Obviously, deviations can only be measured from norms, in this case the narrational and stylistic norms of a certain historically determined mode of practice. Throughout this thesis I measure Suzuki’s stylistic difference against the norm of ‘classical narrative cinema’ (discussed below) which I take to have been predominant from 1945-c.1967 in both the Japanese and Hollywood studio systems.

Is it proper to define historical modes of practice solely by stylistic norms? Clearly not; my thesis does not view classical norms in contextual isolation. On the other hand, some recent writing on Japanese cinema has attempted to dismiss stylistic norms

as basically irrelevant to critical practice.<sup>15</sup> But if this is so, how do we measure aesthetic change, its constituent effect on and dynamic relation to representation, throughout history?

Bordwell quotes Mukařovský to the effect that ‘The history of art, if we examine it from the standpoint of the aesthetic norm, is the history of revolts against reigning norms.’<sup>16</sup> Bordwell assumes that this diminishes the significance of the unconventional;<sup>17</sup> but my aim is simply to pinpoint (the hitherto unrecognized) contribution of Suzuki to such a period of overthrow. An isolated stylistic event that is ‘unconventional’ must be viewed in a context (Japanese cinema in the 1960s). ‘Transgression’ is always pertinent to its time.

Moreover, I believe we can locate ‘significant stylistic transgression,’ if not the ‘unconventional,’ within Bordwell’s own analysis of narration:

Roland Barthes has spoken of a film’s ‘third meaning’...the realm in which casual lines, colours, expressions, and textures become ‘fellow travellers’ of the story. Kristin Thompson has identified these elements as ‘excess’ material which may stand out perceptually but which do not fit either narrative or stylistic patterns....[They] are utterly unjustified....‘Excess’ may offer a useful way into the film’s overall formal work....renewing its ability to intrigue us by its strangeness....[This] implies an awareness of the structures (including conventions) at work in the film, since excess is precisely those elements that escape unifying impulses.<sup>18</sup>

We may wish to view Suzuki’s consistent but unsystematic departures from studio norms (in every direction: sound, colour, graphics, continuity) as an authorial signature characterized by ‘excess.’ On the other hand, we may wish to reconfigure these formal elements as a declaration of ‘arbitrary’ style which informs Bordwell’s treatment of Godard:

We could also mention the more or less arbitrary juxtaposition of lighting options, colour schemes, camera angles, decoupage options, musical styles, and so forth...Godard...tends to be not systematically oppositional but purely ‘differential.’ He makes a whole film out of the

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Russell, *Classical Japanese Cinema Revisited* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. xii-xiii, 2, 8, 10.

<sup>16</sup> in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 53.

discrete narrational flourishes....Those who admire his films have probably learned to savour a movie as a string of vivid, somewhat isolated effects.’<sup>19</sup>

Whether we view the Suzuki style as ‘excess’ or opportunistically ‘differential’, certainly Japanese critics of the era tended to characterize Suzuki’s films, both positively and negatively, as ‘vivid, somewhat isolated effects.’<sup>20</sup>

### *Classical Narrative Cinema and the Japanese Studio System*

What do we mean when we speak of the ‘classical narrative cinema’ to which post-war Japanese studio practice corresponded? In this section I put forward only a few major attributes of the classical mode.

Bordwell writes, ‘causality is the great unifying principle...any parallelism is subordinated to the movement of cause and effect. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviours.’ This priority of causality within ‘an integral fabula world’—what I term *diegesis* throughout this thesis<sup>21</sup>—‘commits classical narration to unambiguous presentation...The viewer concentrates on constructing the fabula, not on asking why the narration is representing the fabula in this particular way.’<sup>22</sup> In other words, ‘The viewer’s interest is entirely suspense oriented.’<sup>23</sup>

The ‘story world’ presented by the film is eminently knowable by the narration: by the end, little or nothing is left out: ‘the classical film moves steadily towards a growing awareness of absolute truth.’<sup>24</sup> Further, the classical *mise-en-scène* (lighting,

<sup>19</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 317, 320.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Nakahara Yumihiko, review of *Yajū no seishun*, *Eiga Hyōron* (July 1963), pp. 34-36; Kajiwaru Ryūji, ‘Suzuki Seijun no bi (The Beauty of Suzuki Seijun),’ *Eiga Hyōron* (July 1964), in Motomura Shūji, ed, *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū* (Tokyo, Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001,) p. 121-22; Isoyama Hiroshi, Review of *Tōkyō nagaremono*, *Kinema junpō* no. 415 (Late May 1966), p. 62; Tayama Rikiya, ‘Bi no seiri: Suzuki Seijun’ (Suzuki Seijun: The Physiology of Beauty), *Kokubungaku* v. 22 (June 25, 1977), pp. 155-157.

<sup>21</sup> In a wide-ranging revision of the concept, Thomas Elsaesser specifies as ‘single diegesis’ the ‘integral narrative world on the screen’ presented by the developed, rationalised studio system: Elsaesser, ‘Discipline Through Diegesis,’ in Wanda Strauven, ed. *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2006), p. 216.

<sup>22</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>23</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 168.

<sup>24</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 159.

sets, costumes) presents this ‘story world’ as ‘an apparently independent pro-filmic event...as if on stage....The fabula appears not to have been constructed; it appears to have pre-existed its narrational representation.’<sup>25</sup>

As for style and technique, ‘in classical filmmaking the overriding principle is to make every instantiation of technique obedient to the character’s transmission of fabula information. Departures are motivated by longstanding genre conventions (e.g. the musical).’<sup>26</sup> This has consequences for cinema’s representation of space and time, its fundamental referees:

Style typically encourages the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent time and space for the fabula action. Only classical narration favours...the utmost denotative clarity from moment to moment. Classical editing aims to make each shot the logical outcome of its predecessor and at reorienting the spectator through repeated setups. Momentary disorientation is permissible only if motivated realistically.<sup>27</sup>

With causality and clarity as motives, ‘classical style consists of a strictly limited number of particular technical devices organized into a stable paradigm and ranked probabilistically according to syuzhet demands.’<sup>28</sup> Various motivations (generic, intended effect) determine which stylistic options, out of a rather limited range, are used. ‘Most explicitly codified into rules is the system of classical continuity editing. The reliance upon an axis of action orients the spectator to the space.’ The viewer’s comprehensive mastery of depicted space imposes far severer restrictions on shot change (editing): ‘An entire scene without establishing shot is unlikely but permissible; mismatched screen direction and inconsistently angled eye lines are less likely; perceptible jump cuts and unmotivated cutaways are strictly forbidden.’<sup>29</sup>

In two articles from the 1990s, Bordwell claimed that the Japanese studio system from the Great Kantō earthquake (1923) to 1945 also *more or less* (that is, normatively)

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<sup>25</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> Bordwell, p. 163.

<sup>28</sup> Bordwell, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> Bordwell, pp. 163-164.

obeyed the principles of classic continuity editing (shot-reverse shot, axis of action, match on action, POV editing, etc.) and other facets of the classical narrative cinema discussed above. Bordwell's observations—which include an 'ornamental' function of style not regularized in Hollywood—resist easy summary; he views the Japanese cinema of the period, for instance *auteurs* like Shimizu Hiroshi or the flamboyant action-cutting of the silent *chanbara* of Itō Daisuke and others, as regularly exhibiting stylistic flourishes which 'push classical technique to expressive limits,' but which nevertheless 'adhere to continuity principles' and 'Hollywood norms.'<sup>30</sup> In its tendency towards dynamic combinations of 'virtually every Western editing technique,'<sup>31</sup> already in place by 1921 in Murata Minoru's *Rojō no reikon/Souls on the Road*, Japanese films merely reduced the excessive 'redundancy' of Hollywood's stylistic economy, without violating it. Moreover such expressive effects quickly established conventions of their own as 'the reigning style reserved a canonized function for them.'<sup>32</sup> Bordwell sums up, based on a sampling of 163 films of the period:

Directors violate the 180-degree axis of action somewhat more frequently than...in the United States. As a result, occasionally eyelines or frame entrances and exits are inconsistent. First, these deviations are far less frequent than is a more normal handling. Many films obey Hollywood continuity completely. Further-more, mismatched shots typically occur in an unproblematic context. Often the depicted space is already well-established.<sup>33</sup>

Bordwell has been rightfully criticized for what Miriam Hansen called the 'self-imposed consistency' through which significant stylistic deviation becomes virtually impossible within a magically flexible formal system.<sup>34</sup> His unnecessary exclusionism, for instance in judging that 'a film's style creates a systematic context which swallows up discrete elements' such that 'we no longer need make every salient stylistic event thematically or

<sup>30</sup> Bordwell, 'Visual Style and the Japanese Cinema,' *Film History* 7:1 (Spring 1995), pp. 22, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> Bordwell, 'Visual Style and the Japanese Cinema,' p. 21

<sup>32</sup> Bordwell 'A Cinema of Flourishes: Japanese Decorative Classicism of the Pre-war Era' in Arthur Nalletti Jr. and David Desser, eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 331, 338.

<sup>33</sup> Bordwell, 'Visual Style and the Japanese Cinema,' p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses,' in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds., *Reinventing Film Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 337-338.



expressively significant’—seems designed to neutralize *a priori* the significance of minor or counter-hegemonic aesthetic practices.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that Bordwell’s wealth of textual evidence is both useful and inescapable as a means of identifying dominant and minor practices in the studio system. It is not Bordwell’s evidence, but his qualitative interpretation of ‘boundary’ cases, that is legitimately in question.<sup>36</sup> I suggest that we can retool Bordwell’s distinction between ‘problematic’ and ‘unproblematic’ violations of classical economy (in regards to the function and intent of a stylistic event) as a useful tool for mapping both the aesthetic *and* ideological boundaries of the system.<sup>37</sup>

With respect to Japanese studio cinema of the post-war era we are at a disadvantage, however. There has been no similar systematic or evidentiary analysis with which to measure its pertinence to Hollywood’s classical narrative mode of practice.<sup>38</sup>

A revelatory article by Eric Crosby provides some textual evidence for the claim that post-war studio practice adhered to classical compositional norms against which certain

<sup>35</sup> Bordwell, ‘Visual Style and the Japanese Cinema,’ p. 17, 8. Catherine Constable characterizes Žižek’s opposition to Bordwell on this matter in such a way that endorses my emphasis on ‘impertinent’ style events: ‘the exceptional singular case is the one which structurally sustains the theoretical paradigm by instantiating the point at which it fails.’ Constable, *Thinking in Images* (London: BFI: 2005), p. 15. I take the use of ‘sustains’ here as epistemic, not ideological.

<sup>36</sup> Russell, *Japanese Classical Cinema Revisited*, pp. 10-14, is an example of a critique of Bordwell’s evidence which clearly fails without counter-evidence. On the relation of evidence (examples) to theory I follow Constable, who endorses Bill Nichols’ pragmatic criteria of the ‘usefulness’ of a conceptual frame as judged by ‘demonstration of a fit between...theory and examples’; cf. Constable, pp. 21-22.

<sup>37</sup> Bordwell’s ‘A Cinema of Flourishes’ concedes that in some few cases, ‘we have come full circle, now style, in the furthest reaches of decorative elaboration, affects narrative denotation, governing rather directly how we construct and construe the simplest story action,’ (p. 341) but typically evades the consequences of such a concession: how can this remain within the paradigm of classical style? Bordwell’s tendency is to deny the semantic effect of any stylistic event, though this was not the case in his early essay ‘Mizoguchi and the Evolution of Film Language,’ in Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp, eds., *Cinema and Language* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983), in which he writes ‘Mizoguchi’s work shows how a film style can...frustrate knowledge, and pose perceptual problems...We must determine the style’s concrete social function’ (pp. 110, 113). As a more recent corrective, Donald Kirihaara’s treatment of Mizoguchi creates a broader space for authorial unconventionality and meaning effects, even while appealing to Bordwell’s (narrower) concept of parametric narration in Ozu: Kirihaara, ‘Reconstructing Japanese Film’ in Bordwell and Carroll, eds., *Post-theory* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 514-515.

<sup>38</sup> Burch rather haphazardly indicated that with the reorganization of the film studios under the American occupation, studio cinema fell in line with a stylistically conservative, ‘realist’ narrative economy of ‘Western-style’ films: *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, rev. ed. (University of California- Berkeley, 1979), pp. 243-4, 275-278, 284-5, 287-8, 299. Richie in his *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (Kodansha 2001), pp. 116-119, speaks of a new realism or verisimilitude but does not specify its formal parameters; he also notes, pp. 115, 134, a new ‘imitation’ of Hollywood based on viewing of new American films. More revealing is his earlier condemnation of ‘one of the most conservative, artistically reactionary...and unprofessional film industries in the world,’ at exactly the time in question here, the mid-to-late 1950s: Anderson and Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, rev. ed. (Princeton, 1982), pp. 332, 345.

directors such as Suzuki and Okamoto differentiated themselves.<sup>39</sup> We can moreover supplement the films that Crosby has sampled with the films of Nikkatsu's higher-ranking directors from 1954-1966 such as Inoue Umegetsu, Saitō Buichi, Noguchi Hiroshi, and even the younger Masuda Toshio, which are unproblematically classical in virtually every respect. Contrary to scholars who have assumed continuity, the post-war cinema to 1963 simply had no equivalent to the extraordinary stylistic breadth of technique and differential quality of Naruse's astonishing 'subjective' montage from 1931's *Koshiben ganbare/Flunky Work Hard!* It is a particularly inescapable conclusion that post-war Nikkatsu productions, despite their function as youth-oriented *akushon* (action) material, were far more conservative in their stylistic economy (continuity, camera movement, reliance on the scene as the principle dramatic unit) than the pre-war cinema, for instance Ito's *chanbara*.

What does the notion of studio classicism matter to this thesis? In the chapters below I will demonstrate that nearly every Suzuki film from 1963 violates every single one of the norms and principles listed above, and that these violations are 'problematic' with regard to spatio-temporal orientation, as well as excessive beyond narrative functionality and the tolerance for 'ornamental novelty' that Bordwell detected in the (pre-war) studio system.

### *Ideology*

Along with Standish (2011) and a minority of recent works on the Japanese cinema, I retain the useful concept of *ideology*. As defined by Turner in his study of cinema as a cultural reflection of social *praxis*, ideology is a tacit, unspoken, only partly conscious 'theory of reality', which in turn spawns beliefs, practices, and accepted

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<sup>39</sup> Crosby, 'Widescreen Composition and Transnational Influence: Early Anamorphic Filmmaking in Japan' in Steve Neale and Sheldon Hall, eds., *Widescreen Worldwide* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 173-199.

‘social and political formations.’<sup>40</sup> Ideology, according to Althusser, mediates how we ‘react to the conditions of our existence.’<sup>41</sup> Ideology is detectable in any Japanese film, and while Suzuki often situates himself against certain dominant forms, his films both passively and actively reflect others. On the whole, I will read Suzuki’s signature as largely commensurate with Adorno and Horkheimer’s seminal criticism of ‘the way...dominant ideologies distorted reality in order to legitimate the interests of the ruling class...[with] the emergent “mass culture” industry as the principal source of such legitimation.’<sup>42</sup> Further, Suzuki’s oppositional cinema increasingly constituted a critique of ‘the ideology of its forms’ and posed ‘alternatives to its systems of representation.’<sup>43</sup>

In this dimension we will be content to situate Suzuki’s practice within Comolli and Narboni’s classic distinction between films which ‘are imbued...with the dominant ideology...and...give no indication that their makers are aware of the fact’ and films which ‘intercept it and make it visible by its mechanisms’.<sup>44</sup> Further, I find that Suzuki’s reflexive, mediated, and artificial cinema sometimes aligns itself with the progressive ‘theoretical cinema’ of the influential French journal *Cinéthique* which, on David Rodowick’s interpretation, advocates ‘a process where the camera, refusing the ideality of communication without a channel for which it was designated, takes account of its transformation of the object. Second, it is not the world...that this cinema acknowledges as its subject but...rather, ideologies...’<sup>45</sup> Having said this, how can it be that Suzuki

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<sup>40</sup> Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 133-4.

<sup>41</sup> Althusser in D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Aitken, *European Film Theory*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, ‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,’ in Aitken, p. 121. In my selective formulation of Comolli and Narboni I consciously bracket out their highly questionable notion of what constitutes a ‘directly political’ subject for cinema as well as their infamous ‘category e’ of films which transgress through internal tension, a provocative notion which was overused by a generation of critics to recuperate virtually any studio film as ‘progressive.’ cf. Rodowick, p 78; Bill Nichols, ‘Style, Grammar, and the Movies’ in *Movies and Methods*, Volume I, pp. 618-625.

<sup>45</sup> Rodowick, *Crisis of Political Modernism*, p. 98. I am highlighting here a single point of agreement between Rodowick and *Cinéthique* concerning the possibility of a critical, reflexive, and politically committed film practice that intervenes in some of the ideological operations of the cinema. However it should be noted that Rodowick is also critical (pp. 93-100) of the arguments, methods, and presuppositions of the ‘political modernist’ school of film

offers a critically ‘mediated’ cinema without presupposing a view of the ‘ideological effect of the apparatus’? Put simply, I shall argue that Suzuki became suspicious of the attempt to capture the ‘real’ in narrative cinema *as then practiced*, perhaps because it constrained reference to the reproduction of clichéd social relations, or because narrative economy constrained the ‘aberrant meanings’ of visual excess and textual play.

Like Ōshima or Yoshida, Suzuki was undoubtedly concerned on his own terms with what constitutes a political aesthetic. But unlike French theorists, his challenge to narrative continuity was not so much concerned with the perceived ideological effects of the cinema apparatus.<sup>46</sup> Rather, he showed a concern about the historical determination of the Japanese studios as an arm of the institutional elite wholly given over to mythic-generic, narrative, and stylistic formulae that constrained the possibility of social criticism. Rodowick has proposed an applicable critical stance that reaches beyond the binaries of Lacanian-Althusserian film theory as one that ‘must concentrate...on the intertextual networks of discursive practices as they function to restrain contradiction by posing limits to the productivity of meaning...’<sup>47</sup> I argue that this is precisely what Suzuki’s rebellious aesthetic aims at vis-à-vis Nikkatsu and the state (Chapter 4 and 8). I will also trace how Suzuki sought systematically to posit a continuous relation between patriarchal power structures that many post-war Japanese thinkers (the advocates of democracy, for example) saw as basically distinct: the Meiji oligarchy, the wartime military elite, the American occupation, post-war capitalism and media, the post-war yakuza.

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criticism that emerged in the late 1960s French cinema journals (including the writings of J.L. Baudry and Jean-Paul Fargier in *Cinéthique*) and subsequently in the writings of Stephen Heath for the journal *Screen*. Comolli and Narboni, in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (see fn. 1), criticized the position of *Cinéthique* and argued that cinema, like other cultural products, is ideological by nature; thus it is the work of film criticism (as opposed to filmmaking) to achieve a theoretical practice that identifies and critiques its ideological operations. See Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 69-70, for a further, trenchant critique.

<sup>46</sup> Rodowick, *Crisis of Political Modernism*, pp. 67, 70-73, 89-97.

<sup>47</sup> Rodowick, p. 298.

To be clear, however, I do not wish to assume Althusser's *a priori* and perjorative definition of ideology as a 'transhistorical...narrative'<sup>48</sup> that is 'fundamentally instrumental, manipulative, and illusory,'<sup>49</sup> existing merely as the putative 'rational' justification of existing relations of production and therefore to be constantly opposed by 'theoretical practice.' That conception was produced for the general purpose of social theory without any regard for aesthetic practice. French journals such as *Cinéthique* adapted Althusser's view of ideology largely to posit 'an intrinsic and intractable relation between texts...regardless of the social or historical context of that relation.'<sup>50</sup> But in discussing the ideology of aesthetic practices we must be mindful of the actual historical formations of discourse, and we may, moreover, endorse Noël Carroll's argument that ideology must be situated in a dynamic relation to a medium's internal historicity, including generic and stylistic traditions.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, I would go further than Carroll's still somewhat perjorative use of 'ideology' in favour of Rodowick's claim that 'aesthetic practice is indistinguishable by any criterion of judgment ...from the area of the ideological,'<sup>52</sup> no matter what its revolutionary-minded practitioners might wish. If this much is accepted, films can still retain the ability to 'intervene decisively in...the transformation of social identity and desire' through a process of 'institutional and ideological' struggle.<sup>53</sup>

### *Reflexivity and Spectacles of Desire*

In Chapters 4 and 7 of this thesis I make a case that Suzuki, despite or perhaps because of his situation as a 'popular filmmaker' for the commercial studios, developed a quintessentially reflexive film practice. Robert Stam's *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*,

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<sup>48</sup> Rodowick, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Aitken, *European Film Theory*, p. 119.

<sup>50</sup> Rodowick, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> Noël Carroll, 'Art, Film, and Ideology: A Response to Blaine Allan' in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge, CUP, 1996), pp. 394, 396-7.

<sup>52</sup> Rodowick, p. 291.

<sup>53</sup> Rodowick, p. 292.

a major, summative treatment of this topic, offers many observations about reflexive cinematic practice that I have used to characterize Suzuki's authorship as well as situate it historically within some broadly reflexive trends and tendencies of transnational artistic modernism in the last century. Although hampered by unsystematic analogies with pre-modernist literature, I read Stam as ultimately effective in posing a cinematic 'reflexivity' as a sort of doppelgänger or parasitic tradition within cinematic narrative which 'subverts the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication' and 'interrupts the flow of narrative in order to foreground...specific means of...filmic production....[Reflexive films] deploy myriad strategies—narrative discontinuities, authorial intrusions, essayistic digressions, stylistic virtuosités. They share a playful, parodic, disruptive relation to established norms and conventions.'<sup>54</sup> Stam's trope of reflexivity allows us to understand, *contra* Bordwell, how reflexivity, even in a popular idiom, can ludically deploy and even depend on established conventions of narrative integration as baseline norms from which to interpolate a non-diegetic rupture or discontinuity that avoids being 'swallowed up' (Bordwell) by the dominant system.<sup>55</sup> Much reflexivity trades on viewer expectations or 'spectatorial competence' in given aesthetic codes in order to achieve the 'the rude shocks of rupture and discontinuity' that 'calls attention to the gaps and holes and seams in the narrative tissue.'<sup>56</sup>

Stam offers various types and sub-types of reflexive address, but his many examples seem to presume or require a distinction between direct reflexivity (e.g. the film director addressing the viewer) and indirect, as characterized by allusion, inter-textuality, metaphor;<sup>57</sup> Suzuki's work falls in to the latter. This type is broad and is perhaps best defined, or is perhaps only capable of being defined, negatively, by its lack

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<sup>54</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992), p. ix.

<sup>55</sup> see p. 19, fn. 37 above.

<sup>56</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, pp. 21, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Stam's second chapter, pp. 72-126, does not systematically make this (presumably useful) distinction.

of interest in seeking transparency and verisimilitude and its refusal to offer itself entirely as a perceptual and cognitive ‘fictional reality’. And yet while it is unquestionable that Suzuki’s mature films more or less acknowledge their artefactual nature, we may also observe throughout his career a sense of what Stam, following Bakhtin, labels as ‘carnavalesque’. This term suggests a relation to the comic as well as a tradition of special social occasions when conventional social roles and behaviours can be disregarded or upturned. But we might better consider this mode as ‘anarchic,’ where not only our customs but our fundamental beliefs are called into question. If nothing can be taken more seriously than anything else, then all is tintured as being both comical and intellectually suspect. Parody, satire, the unseemly, the grotesque, the violent, the simply nonsensical (all hallmarks of Suzuki’s practice) are held up against and juxtaposed to their ‘straight’ counterparts, that is, to conventional behaviour and belief structures, constructive edifices.

However, Stam’s account of cinematic reflexivity tends to reify a canonical European ‘art practice’ (Brecht, Godard) at the expense of other manifestations. By questioning some aspects of Stam’s polemic opposition between Brechtian reflexivity and popular ‘illusionism,’ we may shed some light on the differences that separate ‘canonical’ art film practice (Godard, Ōshima) from populist but dissentient artists like Suzuki who seem to have been repressed by our official (and often narrowly politicized) cinematic histories. Unsurprisingly, the opposition has much to do with cinema’s representation and channeling of desire. At times, Stam’s dependence on Brecht seems to lapse into what Stam himself calls a ‘kind of puritanism’ marked by the ‘unnuanced and guilty condemnation of a manipulative apparatus as if it were part of a conspiratorial effort to delude.’ He claims that ‘the progressive unveiling of the female body in a kind of interminable striptease parallels the more general process by which the dominant

cinema capitalizes on scopophilia by providing more and more to see: colour, cinemascope, split-screen.’ Attributing a purely commercial motivation to these developments, Stam continues, ‘whether in the form of the explicitly pornographic or the perversely spectacular, the film industry has endlessly fabricated new objects of consumption to satisfy the cupidity of one of the primary erotic organs- the eye.’<sup>58</sup> In my view, Stam commits a fundamental misstep by suggesting an equation or close parallelism between the specular objectification of the female body and the abstract, attractive textures of cinematic experience: light, colour, expanse, and so forth. Is there any justification for this other than conspiratorial?<sup>59</sup> What if these relations of desire (only two of many which the cinema brings to bear) appeal to different psychic orders and processes? What if they fulfil different needs? If this is so, how can they be of the same political valence? Shouldn’t such political valuation be measured in the contexts of history, culture, mode of practice? These are crucial questions for Suzuki, for throughout his opus I have found a love of spectacle and, seemingly, a motive to defend it through a differential politics of the image. How can we avoid a new iconoclasm that condemns all cinematic spectacle (indeed the erotic component of all art?) as ‘unnatural,’<sup>60</sup> without giving in to the manipulation of the visual by institutional power?

### *Paradigms of Interpretation: Masculinity and Deleuze’s Time Image*

I have presupposed the foregoing positions on authorship, style, ideology, and the possibility of reflexivity in order to carry out the textual analysis of Suzuki’s films that appears in the following chapters. Throughout this thesis, however, I have also related my analysis to certain commonly used paradigms of interpretation—chiefly those

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<sup>58</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature* p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, among others, notably rejected the attempt to treat cinema’s visual pleasures as subjugation or sadism: ‘De Sade, Sergeant of Sex,’ in Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>60</sup> A essentialist binary between the ‘natural’ (female) sexual body and the mediated representation of it is evident in Stam’s treatment of *Rear Window* (p. 41) and his view of Godard as rejecting an ‘alienating’ cinematic eroticism (p. 58).



relating to the cinematic representation of gender difference (masculinity) and time (the philosophy of Deleuze). If textual analysis is formally distinct from these paradigms, its significance may be further appreciated in relation to them. In this section I briefly outline the nature and limits of my appeal to these interpretive tools.

Apart from a suspicion of patriarchal institutions, I shall argue that the only consistent theme that emerges from Suzuki's wide-ranging representations of Japanese society is a modern crisis of masculinity. Isolde Standish has provided the most influential study of masculinity in post-war Japanese cinema. Her work on the *nagaremono* (heroic drifter) motif in 1960s *yakuza* movies argues that even when the gangster protagonists are loners they are typified by a strict, self-denying adherence to an ideological code which she identifies as *jingi* ('morality'). Moreover she demonstrates that this ideology, writ large as an ideal patriarchal social order, is continuous with the male-centred conservative political discourse of other studio genres such as war films, which insisted on the preservation of the *kokutai* (essentially, the emperor-state, the pre-war political and social order) as a justification for the war dead.<sup>61</sup>

Apart from its own irreducible specificity, 'the Suzuki Difference' is also an exemplar of the break from classical cinema and the transition to a 'modern' cinematic form which film historians associate with the 'New Wave' movements of the 1960s. On this reading, Suzuki was a formal precursor of these movements regardless of whether he was recognized as such. Gilles Deleuze's concept of the *time image* is a major attempt to theorize the transition from classical cinema to modern cinema and to situate this within Deleuze's comprehensive formal taxonomy of cinematic signs. I have found the *time image* uniquely useful in understanding the philosophical/ideological significance of the Suzuki style, particularly in regards to the use of discontinuity.

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<sup>61</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* (Surrey, Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 68-96, 159-171.

The axiom that governs Deleuze's work on cinema is that all cinema has something to say, i.e. implicitly expresses a concept, about its constituent elements of time and space. Through style, these concepts decisively affect representation. Deleuze's *time image* is a cinematic image which, through various means, presents a direct image of time, as opposed to an 'indirect' image of time, subordinated to on-screen movement, which characterizes the *movement image* of the classical cinema. This *movement image* had achieved durability by mimicking the human sensory-motor schema of perception and action as the basis for classical continuity editing, which has 'constituted time in its empirical form...as progression...of successive shots.'<sup>62</sup> But this can be negated by various formal means:

Thanks to the loosening of the sensory-motor linkage...time ceases to be derived from movement, it appears in itself and itself gives rise to *false movements: the images are no longer linked to rational cuts and continuity, but are relinked by false continuity and irrational cuts*.<sup>63</sup>

We may wish to see Suzuki's practice as transitional, constantly stepping over and back from this line between classical (narrative) and modern formal approaches. But from 1965, Suzuki's style of 'false continuity and irrational cuts' (Chapters 5-9) paralleled Deleuze's *time image*. In a situation of irrational and discontinuous juxtaposition, the cinematic image is in a sense simplified: the 'image itself is the system of relationships between its elements,' that is, pure optical (and sonic) elements that are no longer anchored and constrained by continuity. These pure *opsigns* are only the first of many cinematic signs which, according to Deleuze, arose as possibilities through the break-up or negation of classical cinematic economy. 'There are many possible transformations, almost imperceptible passages, and also combinations between the movement-image and

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<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), p. 271.

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. xi.

the time-image'.<sup>64</sup> As I explore throughout this thesis, this transformation has various consequences for the cinematic representation of truth and falsehood, subjectivity, moral judgment, even the aesthetics of colour.

In a rare attempt to describe the historical conditions of the cinema, Deleuze identifies the Second World War as the decisive break in cinema history because, 'in Europe, the post-war period...greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe....deserted but inhabited...waste ground, cities in the course of demolition and reconstruction.' Some scholars such as David Martin-Jones have objected that Deleuze's temporal scheme for the creation of a modern cinema is limited in its euro-centrism and heedless of the cinema of developing countries.<sup>65</sup> But in regards to Japan, Deleuze's account could not be more appropriate. No one understood better than ordinary Japanese the experience of staring helplessly at bombed-out spaces or indeterminate, faceless, de-historicized remains. Such conditions demanded an altered scheme of representation.

## II. A BRIEF SKETCH OF SUZUKI CRITICISM

There are hundreds of texts on Suzuki in Japanese and English that attest to his status as a celebrity *auteur*. In both languages, however, interviews, anecdotes, and film reviews vastly outweigh the minority of serious scholarly and critical writing on Suzuki's films. Those critical writings amount to a tiny output compared to the work that has been done on *nuberu bagu* directors like Ōshima, Yoshida, Imamura and, recently, Terayama.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 270.

<sup>65</sup> Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 10-15.

<sup>66</sup> Steven C. Ridgely, *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Shūji* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Suzuki scholarship in English is still a matter of sparse and occasional treatment, usually in hard-to-find film festival programmes.<sup>67</sup> David Desser's rather tentative 1994 article on Suzuki's use of colour was the first scholarly piece written in English;<sup>68</sup> Eric Crosby's recent article, as discussed above, has represented major progress, as have two valuable pieces (discussed in Chapter Nine) by the literary scholar Rachel DiNitto on *Zigeunerweisen*.<sup>69</sup> And while Suzuki in Japan has been subject to dozens of film reviews, interviews, retrospective articles, and two major books, the treatment of Suzuki has been hampered more than most by a tendency in Japanese film studies towards anecdotal history and round-table discussion as opposed to analysis.<sup>70</sup> This is clearly evident in the two full-length books on Suzuki, the first edited by Ueno Kōshi in 1986.<sup>71</sup> Apart from its superb annotated filmography this consists of a round-table discussion of four critics. Although useful as a discussion of contexts such as the early years of post-war Nikkatsu, the discussion contains no real analysis, little extended interpretation, and a typical unwillingness to specify and pursue disagreement. The second book on Suzuki, *Sei/jun/ei/ga* from 2006 is simply a long interview with a reticent director.<sup>72</sup> Although essential for its wealth of production information, the editors typically follow the director's lead in evading interpretation. In general, Suzuki has been the most evasive of interview subjects, often more so with Japanese than with Western interviewers.<sup>73</sup> A

<sup>67</sup> For instance, Simon Field and Tony Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill: The Delirious Cinema of Suzuki Seijun* (London: Institute for Contemporary Arts, 1994) and the rarer but more valuable Seijun Suzuki and Shigehiko Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem=Suzuki Seijun: the Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991).

<sup>68</sup> Desser, 'Gate of Flesh(tones)' in Linda C. Erlich and Desser, eds. *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts of China and Japan* (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1994), pp. 299-321.

<sup>69</sup> Rachel DiNitto, 'Translating Pre-war Culture Into Film: The Double Vision of Suzuki Seijun's *Zigeunerweisen*,' *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30 (Winter 2004), pp. 35-63; *Uchida Hyakken: a critique of modernity and militarism in prewar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>70</sup> Watanabe Takenobu's *Nikkatsu akushon no kareina sekai, vol. 2 1963-1967* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1981-2) offers remarkably close readings of a few Suzuki films although his focus is on the Nikkatsu 'house style' rather than directorial style.

<sup>71</sup> Ueno Kōshi, ed. *Suzuki Seijun zen eiga* (Tokyo: Rippu shobō, 1986).

<sup>72</sup> Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, eds. *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006), p. 168.

<sup>73</sup> There are many examples of this, but in general Suzuki's game-like penchant for evading interpretation through meaningfully ambiguous pronouncements is clear from his visit to the Pesaro Film Festival in 1984: he avoided a question on visual design by saying 'the scenario comes, then ten days preparation, twenty-five days shooting, and I'm finished. That's it.' Asked about editing, Suzuki echoed John Ford (a notorious interview subject) by saying 'I never

third, highly useful book on Suzuki was edited by Motomura Shūji in 2001.<sup>74</sup> It is something of a miscellany of round-table discussions, interviews, and reprinted journal pieces, with only two new critical essays, themselves heavily anecdotal. It is partly due to these tendencies that critical consensus about Suzuki's authorship remains too underdeveloped to be seriously debated or substantiated. For Ryōgoku Midori, Suzuki is a romantic idealist, albeit a modernist one;<sup>75</sup> for Hasumi Shigehiko (discussed below), he is a strict realist. Moreover, partly because of a lack of stylistic analysis (as discussed in Part One), it is difficult to assess whether Japanese criticism has treated the Suzuki style as largely a product of Nikkatsu's 'house' tendencies or largely differential to it. Some critics seem to have it both ways.<sup>76</sup> Even the common view of Suzuki as having a differential style of vivid effects that depart from narrative motivation has been contested by Hasumi, a major critic.<sup>77</sup>

Satō Tadao's brief chapter on Suzuki from *Nihon eiga shishoshi* (1970), remains perhaps the most significant critical essay on Suzuki.<sup>78</sup> But to what extent should Satō's forty-year old piece determine the topics and parameters of our study? Satō makes three tremendous contributions to the study of Suzuki—on the topics of negativity, war, and irony. They are each related to the inescapable centrality of violence as the core of his work. The first contribution connects violence to Suzuki's own stated preference for an essentially negative or 'anti-constructionist' aesthetic: '...what remains in our memory is

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saw the edited films. Because I knew what I shot.' Sadao Yamane, 'Katō Tai and Suzuki Seijun' in *Eiga ga hadaka ni naru toki* (Tokyo, Seidōsha, 1988), p. 35. Suzuki conducted all his interviews as a *working* director and, having been blacklisted for ten years, had every reason to fear the misperception of his attitudes on the part of film producers.

<sup>74</sup> Motomura, ed, *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> Ryōgoku Midori, 'Onna jōi no shisō' (Thoughts of a Superior Woman: On Suzuki Seijun), *Eiga hyōron* (May 1966), in Motomura, ed., *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Nakahira Yumihiko, review of *Yajū no seishun*, *Eiga hyōron* (July 1963), pp. 34-36; David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre* (Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1988), p. 11, 69-70; Mark Schilling, *No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Godalming: FAB Press, 2008), pp. 140-145.

<sup>77</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons' in Seijun Suzuki and Shigehiko Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem=Suzuki Seijun: the Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms*, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> This has been available—and highly influential—in English as translated by Gregory Barrett in Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), pp. 221-229.

not “construction” but “destruction.” Making things is not what counts. The power that destroys them is.’<sup>79</sup>

Satō’s second point, still unappreciated by Japanese critics, is to situate Suzuki, despite his work in studio entertainment, as a consistently political director who represented the anxieties and violence of post-war society as a reflection of his war experience. As a social response, through filmmaking, to those experiences of annihilation and authoritarian coercion, Suzuki’s negativity therefore highlights ‘the countercultural aspect of anti-moralistic and anti-establishment themes, and in technique...aims for an unconventional style’.<sup>80</sup> This is apt, yet Satō’s wartime focus ignores other essential discursive relations to post-war culture, for example the reaction to imposed capitalism, the great ‘structured absence’ of Suzuki’s work (Chapters 4-8).

Satō’s third and most important contribution was to characterize the Suzuki aesthetic as principally *ironic* (what Satō calls ‘humour’). In *Cinema ‘69* Suzuki was asked why violence is depicted humorously in his films. ‘It is inexcusable to say so but...when you go to war...it is humorous.’ As an example, Suzuki gives an account of naval burial at sea: the ridiculous sound of dead bodies plunking into the ocean, one after another, followed by the rat-tat-tat of the trumpet.<sup>81</sup> Satō gives a superb gloss to this notion: ‘For Suzuki, who had lived amid annihilation, it was necessary to view oneself objectively, even to the point where mutability appeared pathetic and humorous at the same time.’<sup>82</sup> Satō thereby equates humour (irony) with objectivity. This in turn may help us to understand the tone of Suzuki’s address to the spectator. Moreover, I believe that we can take this notion of irony further than Satō did. The example in *Kantō*

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<sup>79</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 224.

<sup>80</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 222.

<sup>81</sup> translated in Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 225.

<sup>82</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 225.

*mushuku* (1963) of a non-diegetic red glow behind the collapsing walls illustrates the point.



1.1 Empathy or Irony? As Kobayashi Akira slays two gamblers in a meaningless quarrel, the *shōji* (sliding paper walls) collapse to reveal a non-diegetic red glow behind them (*Kantō mushuku*, 1963).

Satō raises the notion of a Brechtian alienation effect, only to reject the idea and claim that Suzuki employed the effect ‘to enforce the pathetic beauty of the actor’s pose to induce empathy.’<sup>83</sup> The emphasis on the body as part of a visual tableau is well characterized. But I want to take issue with the notion that Suzuki’s stylization is in any way motivated by ‘empathy,’ whether the term is used to mean secondary identification or, in the case of Satō, perhaps a recognition of the traditional ‘pathos of evanescence’ in Japanese culture. In subsequent chapters, I shall argue that Suzuki’s mature films are strategically drained of empathetic identification in favour of irony that, one might argue, is precise and analytical in regards to social ideology. Satō himself provides the best evidence with a first-hand account of seeing *Kantō mushuku* in the cinema: ‘While the viewers were startled and absorbed by them, they could not help laughing at themselves

<sup>83</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 227. Satō nevertheless proposes a distinction between emotion as ‘catharsis’ and Suzuki’s pathetic, comic approach.

for having been taken in by such abrupt histrionics'.<sup>84</sup> I would offer this as an exemplary description of viewing a Suzuki film, and as the essential 'Suzuki Difference' in genre filmmaking: a pleasurable, ironic distance achieved via artifice.

An essay by the influential scholar, Hasumi Shigehiko, which appeared in a special 'Suzuki' issue of *Yuriika* film magazine, is a study in contrast.<sup>85</sup> It de-emphasizes the ideological discourse of Suzuki's films but usefully re-emphasizes a reflexive aesthetic one. Hasumi's analysis of Suzuki's nature imagery yields the valuable insight that Suzuki 'resists' the symbol-laden images of the four seasons so essential to Japanese poetic tradition (and classical studio film), such that seasonal images 'are completely disconnected from [their] natural sequence'.<sup>86</sup> Further, Suzuki 'would never dream of using snow as a symbol for the end of a film'.<sup>87</sup> By these means, Hasumi shows concretely that Suzuki's visual signature is resistant to conventional (cultural) signification, even to the wartime romanticism that Satō thought so influential. Aesthetically, 'Suzuki is perhaps, with...Godard, one of the few directors who is not afraid to be concrete',<sup>88</sup> because 'everything is surface and action is pure',<sup>89</sup> unsullied by traditional symbolism.

However, Hasumi also claims that Suzuki's authorship 'is not a game to escape the banality of the story,' despite Suzuki's own statements to the contrary,<sup>90</sup> and 'reflects a consistent dedication to action and suspense'.<sup>91</sup> In doing so Hasumi, who is not interested in studio conventions, unwittingly reinscribes the acknowledged 'difference'

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<sup>84</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 227.

<sup>85</sup> Hasumi, 'Suzuki Seijun mata wa kisetu no fuzai, *Yuriika* no. 23 v. 4 (1991) pp. 38-57. A slightly earlier version appeared in in a 1991 Rotterdam film festival program, with English/Dutch translation by Jacinta Hin, Roos Eijsten and Frank van Herk, cited below.

<sup>86</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons' in Seijun Suzuki and Shigehiko Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem=Suzuki Seijun: the Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons', p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons', p. 23.

<sup>89</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons', p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 170; Rayns, 'The *Kyōka* factor' in Rayns and Field, eds., *Branded to Thrill: the Delirious Cinema of Seijun Suzuki*, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons', p. 14.



of Suzuki back into the studio's dominant aesthetic discourse of narrative and melodrama, although not, tellingly, sentiment.<sup>92</sup> I depart from Hasumi here and deal with this claim in Chapter Six. Suzuki's purpose is not to reify or rebuild the classical studio narrative that he departs from: it is to replace it with his own, in which a proper balance (or a reverse *imbalance*) of spectacle, narrative, and intellectual relation is restored.

Against Hasumi's view we might oppose the French scholar of the *nuberu bagu*, Max Tessier, on Suzuki's stylistic negation of the generic studio narratives assigned to him: 'Suzuki introduced a humorous and critical distance, even an absurdist dimension....[He] subverts the overt meanings of his scripts.... [His] derision is aimed against a genre and a morality...He denies any validity, any credibility to these clichés.'<sup>93</sup> If Tessier has overemphasized derision towards genre material, clearly the writings of Hasumi and others, particularly in downplaying Suzuki's negative impulse, have erred in the opposite direction.<sup>94</sup>

Tayama Rikiya's 1977 article in the journal *Kokubungaku* expresses what I take to be a fairly common view of Suzuki within the critical press. Tayama begins by characterizing Suzuki's authorship as a 'sensuous beauty of imagery'<sup>95</sup> created with enormous technical accomplishment. He defines this image practice as 'European' modernism.<sup>96</sup> This question of style should be the focus of the article, but is then replaced. Clearly influenced by the discourse of *nihonjinron* (essential Japaneseness) by which a distinction is presumed between what is European and 'decidedly Japanese'<sup>97</sup>, Tayama focuses on Suzuki's subject matter and social reference, identifying him with the literally 'Old School' of pre-war values<sup>98</sup>—lyricism, romanticism, even sentimentality

<sup>92</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons', p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> translated in Phillips, Alastair, ed., *The Films of Seijun Suzuki* (Edinburgh Festival Catalogue, 1988).

<sup>94</sup> cf. Tony Rayns, 'The *kyōka* factor,' p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> Tayama Rikiya, 'Bi no seiri: Suzuki Seijun,' *Kokubungaku* v. 22: 8 (June 25, 1977), p. 156.

<sup>96</sup> Tayama, pp. 156, 158.

<sup>97</sup> Tayama p. 158.

<sup>98</sup> Tayama, pp. 156-7.

(which Satō and Hasumi had rejected). What is typical of Tayama's view is the binary of style and content, an ascription of Suzuki's style as 'personal' while his content remains a matter of biographical and ideological determination. What is missing is a workable measure of how style conditions, affects, and sometimes negates reference. Suzuki emphasizes many pre-war aesthetic forms (visual metaphors of *mujō* such as fireworks, the rapid comic styles of Naruse and others, the grotesque 'nonsense' of theatrical revue) that escape or negate the patriarchal constructs to which those forms had been instrumentally fitted during wartime—either through irony or simply the relativizing potential of the image.

In order, therefore, to synthesize these variant readings and establish a nuanced critical position on Suzuki, I have relied on writing about other Japanese cultural and cinematic subjects, for instance, the writings of Desser and (more recently) Isolde Standish on the Japanese *nuberu bagu*. Desser in 1988 asked why Suzuki had not been considered part of the New Wave: 'He was as formally challenging, as *disruptive*, as any of them.'<sup>99</sup> Desser noted, but did not substantially address, the methodological limits of the existing literature on the *nuberu bagu*, and the exclusion of Suzuki from Standish's volume also illustrates the point. Though focusing insightfully on the independent productions of the Art Theatre Guild (from 1968), Standish nevertheless discusses studio films from Nakahira and Imamura at Nikkatsu and from the Shōchiku *nuberu bagu* directors. Standish's book does not examine in detail the continuities/discontinuities of discourse, ideology, and style between ATG productions and the earlier *nuberu bagu* studio films in which they were rooted, and so the inclusion of some studio directors over others seems to be otherwise motivated. The choices of focus tend to reify, not without a certain critical self-consciousness, an already canonical view of 'accepted'

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<sup>99</sup> Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 11.

New Wave voices (Ōshima, Yoshida, Imamura, Wakamatsu, associates like Adachi Masao) working (sometimes ambiguously) within a critically endorsed or ‘recognized’ scope of leftist 1960s discourse. Desser and Standish, therefore, do not bridge the gap in Japanese film history between studio/industrial histories on one hand and more-or-less auteurist *nuberu bagu* studies on the other.<sup>100</sup> Too differential for one and too genre-oriented for the other, Suzuki remains fallen in the crack between and thus has little place in *any* published histories of the medium as yet. Only Donald Richie addressed this gap: noting Suzuki’s wide influence as ‘a kind of pre-manqa-esque pop art’—a statement rich in implications that Satō and Hasumi did not consider—he also wrote that ‘One might see Ōshima as a more serious Suzuki Seijun. Both use popular culture, both are concerned with political ideas...both share a very real renegade inventiveness. Both are also intellectuals whose films are about political sedition.’<sup>101</sup> Japanese critics have largely not taken up the comparison.

In summary, then, and in contradiction to Satō, Hasumi, and Tayama, I have treated Suzuki as an author whose differential visual style, excessive and challenging even to narrative causality, is to be read both reflexively *and* politically, the latter through modes of irony and negation. Reflexively, Suzuki emphasises the ‘anti-indexical’ and ‘anti-linguistic’ concreteness of the flat film image, and in doing so opens it up to a profoundly open symbolic signification. Politically, he differentiates himself from both wartime and post-war institutional narratives in order to explore a calculatedly original, yet purely negative ethic. By these means, as I shall now go on to demonstrate, Suzuki opened the door to cinema’s experimental transformations of the late 1960s and beyond.

<sup>100</sup> Standish’s comments in *A New History of Japanese Cinema* on the economy of the masculine POV in both *nuberu bagu* and genre films of the 1960s do address one area of this gap: pp. 223, 228, 257-8.

<sup>101</sup> Richie, *A Hundred Years of Cinema* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), pp. 181, 201.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE FILM CAREER OF SUZUKI SEIJUN

### *Early Life 1923-1948*

Suzuki Seitarō was born on 24 May 1923, in the heart of central Tokyo, reportedly in Nihonbashi (part of Chūō ward),<sup>1</sup> a famous neighbourhood that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been the commercial and cultural capital of the city and the centre from which all geographical distance was measured. It was within walking distance of Marunouchi and Ginza, at that time the respective political/financial and commercial centres of the Japanese Empire). Suzuki was born one hundred days before the Great Kantō earthquake (*Kantō daishinsai*) that would ravage central Tokyo. He was the eldest son of a merchant of dry goods, particularly textiles such as kimonos,<sup>2</sup> who moved his family some years after the quake to nearby Honjō ward (now Sumida Ward). There is little evidence to indicate that the father was particularly prosperous, but his fortunes presumably improved after the move as he allegedly became a manufacturer of bicycle bells.<sup>3</sup> His merchant family did not have the prestige of an aristocratic background (as did the Kurosawa family for instance); rather, Suzuki has proudly described himself as a lifelong *Edokko*, that is, a descendent of working or middle class residents of the old neighbourhoods of Edo. Despite early success in primary school, Suzuki's academic career was marked by failure, possibly because his parents directed him towards trade and vocational schools. After graduating from a Tokyo trade school in 1941,<sup>4</sup> he twice failed the entrance exam to a Tokyo commercial college, and subsequently took the exam for

<sup>1</sup> Ueno Kōshi, *Suzuki Seijun zen eiga* (Tokyo: Rippu shobō, 1986), p. 359, among others, lists Nihonbashi; Mark Schilling, however, in *No Borders, No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Godalming: FAB, 2008), p. 142, says Sumida Ward. The Sumida river divides Sumida and Chūō wards.

<sup>2</sup> Ueno, p. 359; 'Biography' compiled by Hasumi Shigehiko in Suzuki Seijun, Hasumi Shigehiko, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem/Suzuki Seijun: the desert under the cherry blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), hereafter referred to as 'Hasumi (1991)', p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Schilling, p. 142.,

<sup>4</sup> Hasumi (1991), p. 80.

the colonial ‘Asian Development Institute’ with the intention of going to Indochina.<sup>5</sup>

Failing this and several other exams, he finally succeeded in entering the relatively prestigious Hirosaki High School in distant Aomori Prefecture in April 1943.<sup>6</sup>

Suzuki has admitted to being deeply influenced by the urban culture of the Taishō era (officially 1912-1926, but also continuing unabated until a climate of cultural nationalism became pervasive in the mid-1930s), including the dynamic theatre scene of Asakusa. As the director describes:

It was Japan’s Belle Epoch, different from both the Meiji and Shōwa era. The Taishō was a period that glorified freedom. Of course, there was control from above, but within certain bounds the common people were free. There were anarchists, Bolsheviks, terrorists. It was an age of ideology. On stage there was opera and new types of theatre.<sup>7</sup>

Suzuki remembers Taishō not only as an age of comparative political freedom, but as an urban culture of transnational hybridity, the new result of popularly accessible cultural forms (paperback fiction, popular theatre) and technologies (cinema, gramophone).<sup>8</sup> While there is no question that Suzuki was deeply exposed to kabuki and other forms of theatre in this period, sources agree that throughout the 1930s, Suzuki spent much of his time at the movies. He was particularly affected by the popular *jidai-geki* of the time, especially Inagaki Hiroshi’s *Edojō saigo no hi/Last Days of Edo Castle* (Tōhō 1941). Certain European films left a mark as well, including a 1936 film record of Austria’s Burgtheatre and Erik Charell’s *Der Congress Tanzt/Congress Dances* (1931),<sup>9</sup> a lightly satirical musical comedy boasting flamboyant tracking shots, opulent costumes and sets. The film was a perfect correlate to what the press depicted as the *ero-guro-nansensu* culture of the

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<sup>5</sup> Schilling, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> Ueno, p. 360.

<sup>7</sup> Suzuki in Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> translated in Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009), pp. 25-29.

<sup>9</sup> Ueno, p. 360.

Taishō era.<sup>10</sup>

Only months after his entrance to Hirosaki High School, Suzuki was drafted and sent to Chiba Prefecture for combat training as a Private-Second Class in the 83<sup>rd</sup> battalion ‘Imperial Guard’ (equivalent to a General Infantry replacement corps). In 1944, the cargo fleet transporting Suzuki to the Philippines was sunk by American submarines, killing nearly half of Suzuki’s classmates. In a scenario of military desperation, he and the other survivors in Manila were reassigned to the Air Force but then sent back to Taiwan due to an impending attack.<sup>11</sup> On the way, their freighter was sunk by American planes.<sup>12</sup> Sources differ as to whether Suzuki floated on the open sea for days or hours, but he was eventually rescued.<sup>13</sup> Suzuki’s war experience in general seems to have been characterized more by an amazed viewing of the carnage around him rather than direct combat participation, which perhaps explains why his (action film) protagonists also tend to view situations in uncertainty before (or instead of) acting. In Taiwan, Suzuki spent the rest of the war as a sub-lieutenant at an isolated weather observation outpost. Amidst an atmosphere of sexual deprivation and binge drinking, Suzuki uneasily recalled spending his entire pay on the army prostitutes ‘assigned’ to the unit.<sup>14</sup> He returned to Japan in 1946 utterly destitute, but was able to complete his studies in Aomori.<sup>15</sup> Schilling characterizes Suzuki’s war experience as having left a ‘deep distrust of authority.’ This is confirmed by Suzuki’s bitter observation that during the Occupation ‘the relatives of Tōjō Hideki and other army staff received generous pensions’ while he

<sup>10</sup> Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense* (Berkeley, 2009), pp. 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Ueno, p. 360.

<sup>12</sup> Hasumi (1991), p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> The more detailed source, Ueno (p. 360) says eight hours; but Schilling (p. 142), seemingly as a result of his interview with Suzuki, says ‘several days.’ Suzuki was understandably reticent about this period of service, for example omitting it from his memoir of the war translated in Hasumi (1991), p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Suzuki, ‘My Work,’ in Hasumi (1991), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Suzuki also omitted this detail from his memoir *Hanajigoku/Flower Hell* (Tokyo, Hokutō shobō, 1972), translated in Hasumi (1991), p. 29.

and other ex-servicemen received a total of ten yen upon demobilization.<sup>16</sup> In 1948, Suzuki graduated with his high school diploma and returned to central Tokyo, briefly working in an office while boarding with his girlfriend and several prostitutes with GI boyfriends.<sup>17</sup> Despite having no ambitions other than financial security, Suzuki took the entrance exam for the nation's top university, Tokyo University. Failing this, Suzuki suffered a period of 'severe depression,'<sup>18</sup> but eventually discovered the newly established Kamakura Film Academy, for which he passed the exam. Suzuki graduated from film school at the end of that same year and was directed to the exam for the Assistant Director's program at Shōchiku, which he passed. A career seemed to be taking shape.

#### *Assistant Director at Shōchiku and Nikkatsu, 1948-1956*

At this time, Shōchiku was the most successful and prestigious studio in Japan. Its 1949 roster of creative talent included Ozu Yasujirō, Yoshimura Kowazaburō, Kinoshita Keisuke, and Shibuya Minoru, then as now acknowledged masters of post-war classical filmmaking.<sup>19</sup> Suzuki's incoming class, which included future Nikkatsu director Nakahira Kō, received initial training by Yoshimura, who would soon leave the studio in frustration over artistic interference (a pattern which would become endemic by the end of the decade).<sup>20</sup> As a junior Assistant Director, he was initially passed from one film set to another for training, beginning with a film by Shibuya Minoru, *Shushin imada kiezu/Red Lips Still Not Gone*, in 1949.

The *kumi* or 'crew' system of studio filmmaking was integral to the aesthetic vitality of the Japanese studio system. A director would work with same creative and

<sup>16</sup> Suzuki, 'My Work' in Hasumi (1991), p. 29

<sup>17</sup> Suzuki, *Kenka erejii*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed., (Tokyo: Nihon tosho sentā, 2003), pp. 26-35.

<sup>18</sup> Suzuki in Hasumi (1991), p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, eds., *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006), p. 402.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

technical staff on each film; they would make up his crew, a sort of artistic family whose consistency and loyalty assisted the realisation of a directorial signature. Assistant Directors could benefit from having an established director as protégé. At Shōchiku, the Assistant Directors were able to choose their *kumi*, and in 1951 Suzuki joined that of Iwami Tsuruo, a director of melodramas, who at 32 was the youngest director of comparable rank to the studio's masters. Suzuki, now informally married, was finally receiving a modest living wage and presumably absorbing the technics of filmmaking. But he has described his four years with Iwami as merely 'fun,' involving hard drinking and womanizing, and did not feel the director had been an influence on him.<sup>21</sup> This is possibly because 'after work...we were forbidden to talk about movies. The only thing we were allowed to do was drink.' Writing in the 1970s, Suzuki was critical of this lack of an intellectual context at Shōchiku: 'Seven years passed in which we hadn't read a book, seen a film, or thought about politics and our lives in general.'<sup>22</sup> In this climate of stagnation, 'I was a melancholy drunk and soon became known as a relatively worthless Assistant Director...when we were on location, I stayed in the bus.'<sup>23</sup> Despite this self-portrait of indolence, Suzuki in fact wrote some unproduced screenplays during this period.<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, in addition to unsatisfied ambition, Suzuki was experiencing the frustration of being just a cog within a major studio. An important aspect of the *kumi* system was that being Assistant Director was considered as training for becoming Director. 'Chief Assistant Directors' were (theoretically) guaranteed a promotion (at least on a trial basis). But the experience of Suzuki and many others demonstrated

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<sup>21</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, pp. 402-3.

<sup>22</sup> Suzuki in Hasumi, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Suzuki in Hasumi, p. 31

<sup>24</sup> Hasumi (1991), p. 80.



that promotion could take as long as a decade.<sup>25</sup> ‘There were 16 assistant directors ahead of me at Shōchiku. I felt frustrated at ever becoming a director there.’<sup>26</sup>

Although he seems to have risen to the rank of Chief Assistant Director,<sup>27</sup> working on some war films as well as Iwami’s melodramas, he was never promoted, and like many others at Shōchiku, jumped at the offer of a better salary from Nikkatsu when the studio resumed film production in 1954.

Another Chief Assistant who moved from Shōchiku to Nikkatsu was Noguchi Hiroshi, an older filmmaker who would have a decisive effect on Suzuki’s career. Noguchi had joined Nikkatsu’s Tamagawa studios in 1935 and had become a director. But like many filmmakers looking for employment after the war, he accepted a demotion to Assistant at Shōchiku. With Nikkatsu’s exciting new start as a low budget film producer, Noguchi was quickly promoted, but not before he asked Suzuki, who was working under him as script supervisor on a film called *Karadatachi no hana/Orange Flower*, to join him as Chief Assistant Director.<sup>28</sup>

Before this partnership, Suzuki worked as an Assistant on a *jidai-geki* (*Kunisada Chūji*) and a melodrama by Yamamura Sō (*Kuroi shio/Black Tide*). In its early days, Nikkatsu, bereft of star actors, made some prestige literary films (Ichikawa’s *Kokoro*, 1955) and many cheap *jidai-geki* using the actors from the already old-fashioned *shinkokugeki* theatre troupe,<sup>29</sup> which had made its name in the 1920s producing period dramas with more realistic fight scenes. Hasumi Shigehiko described *Kunisada Chūji*, and the other black and white *jidai-geki* made by Nikkatsu at the time, as looking ‘shoddy’ next to the Hollywood films that Nikkatsu itself would

<sup>25</sup> ‘Isetsu: Shōchiku gakkō’ (‘Opinions: The Shochiku School’) in Motomura Shūji, ed., *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001), p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Desjardins, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, pp. 402-3

<sup>28</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 404.

<sup>29</sup> in Ueno, pp. 112-3.

import.<sup>30</sup> This had an unfortunate effect on the careers of Noguchi and Suzuki. Although the violent, erotic, slightly exploitative thrillers they made were seen by millions as the lower half of a Nikkatsu double bill, their déclassé appearance meant that post-war film critics failed to rate them seriously, no matter how original their formal effects.

Noguchi's first post-war film, *Ore no kenjū wa subayai/My Pistol is Quick*, made with Suzuki as Chief Assistant, is unfairly obscure, as it transformed both Nikkatsu and Suzuki. Nikkatsu was the first large-scale, post-war Japanese producer of modern (*gendai*) action pictures, that is, action-oriented melodramas with contemporary rather than historical settings.<sup>31</sup> This tendency developed into the 'Nikkatsu *akushon*' phenomenon in the late 1950s, but in a larger context, the three-decade industrial dominance of the *yakuza eiga* would have been impossible without this early development. Noguchi's film seems to have been the first *gendai* action film at Nikkatsu, and Suzuki recalls having to borrow a pistol from the police, since the studio did not have one.<sup>32</sup>

Very loosely based on a novel by Mickey Spillane, Noguchi's film also showed the hybrid influence of hard-boiled detective literature and the Hollywood crime films that Nikkatsu had imported. As discussed in Chapter Three, Suzuki's career would also become inextricably linked to this tendency. *Ore no kenjū wa subayai* led to a series of films about the intrepid private detective originally played by Kawazu Seizaburō, the second of which (*Rakujitsu no kettō/Duel at Sunset*, 1955) was co-written by Suzuki himself. Noguchi, for his part, would work almost exclusively in crime films until his untimely death in 1967, at the age of fifty-five.

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<sup>30</sup> in Ueno, p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> A similar but certainly smaller development took place as Tōei, which remained the major producer of *jida-geki* and *chanbara* for another decade.

<sup>32</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 404.

*Suzuki as Director: The Early Films 1956-1960*

By 1956, Nikkatsu's *jidai-geki* were being phased out and replaced by urban thrillers and other contemporary pictures, such as melodramas featuring teenage protagonists that evolved from the postwar *seishun eiga* (youth films) of other studios (such as *Aoi Sanmyaku/Blue Mountains*, Shōchiku 1949). This was the context of Suzuki's promotion to director of contemporary pictures, like those of his mentor Noguchi, in 1956. Of Suzuki's first six films (1956-7), four were hard-boiled crime thrillers using Noguchi's stars, Kawazu Seizaburō and Mizushima Michitarō, and staff. His first film however, *Minato no kanpai: shōri wo waga te ni/Harbour Toast: Victory is in Our Grasp*, was a strange combination of youth melodrama and light thriller typical of the later *Nikkatsu akushon* style. It focused on two brothers, a sailor and a jockey who, through the romantic wanderings of the latter, get mixed up with a criminal gambler. The thriller trappings and downcast ending of brotherly sacrifice (typical of the time) demonstrate how Nikkatsu's genres tended to bleed into one another, but the film was really designed as a vehicle for its popular theme tune, and thus is an early manifestation of one of Nikkatsu's more ephemeral genres, the *kayō eiga* or pop-song film, which reflecting the dominance of the youth-oriented record industry.

Over the next four years, Suzuki alternated between crime thrillers and teen melodrama. The *topos* of youth romance in Japanese film was changed forever in 1956, when Nikkatsu produced two notorious film adaptations of the abrasive bestselling novels of Ishihara Shintarō,<sup>33</sup> themselves influenced by hard-boiled fiction, which replaced innocent middle class romance with frank teenage sexuality,

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<sup>33</sup> These two films, Furukawa Takumi's *Taiyō no kisetsu/Season of the Sun* and Nakahira Kō's *Kurutta kajitsu/Crazed Fruit*, caused a national scandal and debate over permissiveness in the cinema. Michael Raine, 'Yūjirō: Youth, Celebrity, and the Male Body,' in Denis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh, eds., *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema* (CUP, 2000), pp. 204-5, 211.

violence, and the fast, reckless lifestyle of Tokyo's *nouveau riche*. These films turned Ishihara's younger brother Yūjirō into Japan's biggest star and started the short-lived but hugely influential *taiyōzoku* or 'Sun Tribe' genre about delinquent youth.

Although Suzuki made only two films that recognizably belonged to the trend, much of his output was effected by this revolution in cinema-going tastes: both his thrillers and youth melodramas such as *Aoi chibusa/Blue Breasts* and *Fumihazushita haru/The Spring That Never Came* (both 1958) consequently featured mild exploitation elements and plots involving sexual violence.

From 1956 to 1960, as a contract director at the bottom of Nikkatsu's directorial ranking system (where he remained for most of his career), Suzuki had no input or control over scripts or leading actors.<sup>34</sup> While all Nikkatsu directors faced similar constraints, top-ranking directors had access to bigger budgets, longer shooting schedules, top stars like Ishihara (who never worked with Suzuki), and greater involvement in script creation. Like Noguchi, Suzuki was instead assigned low-budget B-pictures to accommodate a theatrical double bill. While Suzuki toiled through formulaic scripts and rushed shooting schedules, Nikkatsu promoted two other former Shōchiku Assistant Directors, Kurahara Koreyoshi and Imamura Shōhei. Kurahara, something of a literary intellectual, was an instant success with his first film, the Ishihara vehicle *Ore wa matteiru ze/I am Waiting*, in 1957,<sup>35</sup> while Imamura, who was younger and less experienced than Suzuki, received well-deserved acclaim for his film *Buta to gunkan/Pigs and Battleships*, in 1961. Imamura became a top-ranking director at Nikkatsu, commanding media prestige and high budgets, while Suzuki, who was openly jealous of his rival, worked in obscurity

<sup>34</sup> In Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* (2003), p. 98

<sup>35</sup> Mark Schilling, *No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (Godalming: FAB Press, 2008), p. 135.

and fear of dismissal.<sup>36</sup> Suzuki would be given no more than two weeks preparation time for a picture, and had to devise his camera set-ups the night before shooting.<sup>37</sup>

As with Hollywood B-picture filmmaking, this 'ghetto' position at the studio arguably allowed the director to get away with creative experiments that would never have been allowed in a prestige picture.<sup>38</sup> In their haste to satisfy Nikkatsu's release slate of approximately one new picture per week,<sup>39</sup> B-picture units tended to be left alone, as Suzuki testified: 'The studio had no idea what I was doing until I was finished....The set was the director's territory.'<sup>40</sup> Suzuki has stated frequently that the Nikkatsu scripts he received were formulaic, in fact 'almost always [had] the same plot.'<sup>41</sup> He was consequently motivated to inject some kind of difference into these routine assignments. Apart from reasons of artistic and political discomfort with formulae, it was also necessary to stand out from other young directors like Kurahara.<sup>42</sup> The secretly ambitious Suzuki began to add unscripted visual touches which would sometimes alter the significance of the narrative. Suzuki later testified that he would also borrow techniques that were not part of Japanese studio practice from the Hollywood movies of the time.<sup>43</sup> He credits the post-war films of Hitchcock, Huston, and Ford as significant influences.<sup>44</sup>

Although we can trace a growing assertion of difference, even flamboyance, with each subsequent film, Suzuki was never free from the artistic interference of the studio. At least two films (*Hachi jikan no kyōfu*/8 Hours of Terror, 1957, and

<sup>36</sup> Suzuki in Hasumi (1991), pp. 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Suzuki in Schilling (2003), *The Yakuza Movie Book*, p. 99.

<sup>38</sup> cf. Paul Kerr, 'Out of What Past? Notes on the B film noir' in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Film Noir Reader* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), pp. 108-125. Kerr argues that Hollywood B-picture divisions were economically and otherwise conditioned to allow a 'negotiated opposition' to the realist ideology and aesthetics of the studio 'A' pictures of the era.

<sup>39</sup> Schilling, *No Borders, No Limits* (2008), pp. 14.

<sup>40</sup> in Schilling (2003), p. 99.

<sup>41</sup> Suzuki in Hasumi, (1991), p. 38. cf. Interview with Brian Puterman and Robert Graves, *Asian Cult Cinema* 21 (1998), p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Suzuki quoted in Ian Buruma, 'The Eccentric Imagination of a Genre Filmmaker' in Simon Field and Tony Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill: The Delirious Cinema of Suzuki Seijun* (London: ICA, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> in *Asian Cult Cinema* 21, (1998), p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> in *Asian Cult Cinema* 21, (1998), p. 42

*Suppedaka no nenrei/Naked Age*, 1959) were severely re-edited after Suzuki's cut.<sup>45</sup> Nikkatsu and its board chairman, Hori Kyūsaku, openly disapproved of the farcical touches of the former film (though they were already typical of Suzuki). The director was threatened with dismissal, not for the first time, but Nikkatsu managing director Emori Seijurō insisted that Suzuki was talented and emerged as Suzuki's only executive supporter.<sup>46</sup>

Anxious about his career and finances, Suzuki Seitarō adapted the *nom de plume* Suzuki Seijun as a screen credit in 1958. Despite this, the director continued to receive no critical attention whatsoever. Of his 40 Nikkatsu films, only two early ones were reviewed by the *Asahi shinbun*. In the 1950s, his films were routinely reviewed in *Kinema junpō*, but only because the magazine's policy at the time was to review nearly every release from the major studios. The reviews of his films considered mostly questions of stars and studio trends and showed no recognition of the director's name. This is ironic considering that *Kinema junpō* generally *did* endorse some concept of *auteurism*: the magazine made celebrities out of directors such as Masumura Yasuzō and, most egregiously from Suzuki's point of view, Imamura Shōhei.<sup>47</sup> The simple truth, then, was that critics of the era could not conceive of a 'program picture' director as critically significant. One rare authorial evaluation, in the *Kinema junpō* review of *Ankokugai no bijo/Underworld Beauty* (1958), merely proves the point. 'One feels that director Suzuki Seijun has gotten used to wide-screen black and white [filmmaking],' the critic wrote, oblivious to the

<sup>45</sup> Suzuki in Chris Desjardins, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), p. 146; *Asian Cult Cinema* 21, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Suzuki, 'My Work,' in Hasumi (1991), p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Masumura, in particular, was both a frequent contributor to the magazine and frequently celebrated: for example the *Kinema junpō* no. 261 (Late June 1960) roundtable on 'Cine-realism' pp. 50-55; see further *Kinema junpō* no. 145 (May 1956), pp. 48-50, *Kinema junpō* no. 415 (May 1966), p. 63; *Kinema junpō* no. 428 (Dec. 1966), pp. 30-35. Most telling is the Late July 1964 issue (no. 370) in which a celebration of Masumura's *Manji* (Daiei 1964) appears on the very same page (80-1) as a condescending, scandalized diatribe against Suzuki's *Nikutai no mon* (1964) by Oguri Masami. As for Imamura, the magazine visited him on set for photographs and a feature article in *Kinema Junpō* no. 357 (early Feb. 1964), pp. 13-25.

fact that this film was the *first* film credited to the name of Suzuki Seijun.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, the positive review of this excellent thriller provides additional evidence that, with the advent of ‘Seijun Suzuki,’ a mature and ambitious talent had emerged in full expressive command of the elements of film style.

Still under the shadow of Noguchi, to whom he was devoted, Suzuki had no consistent *kumi* of his own. But this was to change, gradually. On his second film (*Umi no junjō/Pure Emotions of the Sea*, 1956) he was assigned Noguchi’s cinematographer Nagatsuka Kazue. A director of photography at Nikkatsu since the mid-1920s, Nagatsuka was the first and one of the most important of Suzuki’s regular collaborators, a major component of his authorial signature. The veteran Nagatsuka remained quietly respectful of the younger man’s unconventional visual ideas. Suzuki achieved startling effects with other cinematographers in this period, especially in *Ankokugai no bijo*, the director’s first film in Nikkatsuscope (the equivalent of Cinemascope) and a fascinating study in expressive framing. But around 1960 Suzuki came to work almost exclusively with Nagatsuka and his former apprentice, Shigeyoshi Mine, who would photograph Suzuki’s films when the older artist worked with Noguchi. By 1959, Suzuki had also begun to collaborate regularly with editor Suzuki Akira and a stock company of actors.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Okada Seizō, *Kinema Junpō* no. 212 (Early Sept. 1958), p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> Suzuki Akira would not have been considered as part of Suzuki’s *kumi* due to his studio position, but the director so valued his contributions that he retained it for his independent films of the 1980s. This is also true of musical director Yamamoto Naozumi, who began working with Suzuki in the 1960s. Before that decade, the expressive look of Suzuki’s crime thrillers was also due in part to the collaboration of production designers Sakaguchi Takeharu and Chiba Kazuhiko. It would be irresponsible not to mention, also, the contribution of versatile character actors who appeared in film after film throughout Suzuki’s Nikkatsu career: Ashida Shinsuke, usually playing an ambivalent member of the elder generation; Noro Keisuke, usually a bumbling young thug; Kakashina Taku as a gruff working class fellow or an inept crook or lawyer; Abe Tōru, the quintessential *yakuza* villain; and supporting players Chō Hiroshi and Tamagawa Isao, the latter developing into a major player in Suzuki’s films. There was, too, a host of strong supporting actresses in his films including Watanabe Misako, the provocative comedienne Hatsui Kotoe, Nakahara Sanae, and Shiraki Mari, an explosive, challenging screen presence whose potential seems to have been curtailed by Nikkatsu after only a few films.

*A 'Middle Period' at Nikkatsu, 1960-1963*

Several developments in 1960 influenced the shape of Suzuki's career. Firstly, he was assigned to take over Nikkatsu's *Gurentai* series of films (1960). These were light action melodramas with fanciful stories of pure-hearted street youths, starring the teen-aged Wada Kōji, an inexperienced 'spoiled brat' (in Suzuki's words) who was promoted as one of Nikkatsu's 'Diamond Line' of action stars because of his resemblance to Ishihara Yūjirō. This series was but a small cycle within the great genre or mega-genre of Nikkatsu *akushon*, which coalesced around the superstar vehicles of Ishihara and (later) Kobayashi Akira and Akagi Keihachirō. But the term 'Nikkatsu *akushon*' remains elusive and difficult to describe, as it covered, by design, most of the films that Nikkatsu produced, whether hard-boiled thrillers, action comedies, pre-war *yakuza* thrillers, or romantic melodramas, so long as some sort of action set piece was involved. Most of Suzuki's Nikkatsu films after 1958 were a part of this vast territory.

From 1960 to 1963, Suzuki was the exclusive director of vehicles for Wada. The first of his eight Wada films, *Kutabare gurentai/Go to Hell Youth Gang!* (1960), was also Suzuki's first colour film, and he turned an ephemeral rock'n'roll action scenario into an extraordinary experiment in non-diegetic stylization using colour and anamorphic lenses. Although Suzuki expanded these experiments in subsequent films, there is evidence that he chafed at the limitations of the genre and star persona, considering the films not as serious work but as contract commitments.<sup>50</sup> From the studio perspective, however, Suzuki and his 'contemporary' aesthetic had finally been put to financial good use, and indeed Suzuki delivered a few more or less conventional hits such as the coast guard saga *Kaikyo chi ni some/Bloody Channel*

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<sup>50</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 112; cf. Suzuki in *Asian Cult Cinema 21*, p. 58.



(1961). Accordingly, Suzuki received a greater amount of control over editing and (crucially) scripting.<sup>51</sup>

Despite this, one reason for Suzuki's discontent may have been professional envy of colleagues such as Imamura who were treated by the media as artists comparable to the much-touted Shōchiku *nuberu bagu* ('New Wave'). Suzuki enjoyed a productive friendship with one such *nuberu bagu* director, his former colleague Shinoda Masahiro, often calling the younger director, a superb technician, to ask how to photograph a certain idea.<sup>52</sup> Yet it undoubtedly galled Suzuki that his younger associates enjoyed critical notoriety, while he was ignored even for his more politicized films, such as the delinquency film *Subete ga kurutteru* (1960), which was very similar to contemporary films by Ōshima, Shinoda, and Kurahara. Suzuki's fourteen films from 1960 to mid-1963 garnered only a single capsule review in *Kinema junpō*.<sup>53</sup> This frustration may have spurred his increasingly bold and differential stylization of visuals and montage beginning in 1963.

#### *The 'Mature' Suzuki, 1963-1967*

By 1962, Suzuki had again incurred the wrath of the studio president Hori for 'extensive use of symbolism within a traditional action picture' and was assigned only two pictures to direct that year, as opposed to the six made the previous year.<sup>54</sup> But his film *Akutarō* (1963), adapted from a novel by Kon Tōkō, an early Shōwa author resurrected by Suzuki, caught the youth *zeitgeist* and managed to please both audiences, studio, and the director himself. It is a story of an intensely combative and sexual teenager subject to the proto-fascist oppression of educational bureaucracy.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Weisser, 'The Films of Suzuki Seijun,' *Asian Cult Cinema* vol.21 (1998), p.43, 47, 49. Though riddled with careless factual and linguistic errors, this complete annotated filmography was the first of its kind to appear in English and contains valuable anecdotes based on unpublished exchanges with the director.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ueno Kōshi in Hasumi (1991), p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> For the extremely hard-boiled *Kemono no nemuri* (1960), in *Kinema junpō* no. 258 (Early May 1960), p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Weisser, p. 51.

The film begat an artistic partnership which Nikkatsu had allegedly feared: that of Suzuki and art director Kimura Takeo.<sup>55</sup> Given license by a director like Suzuki, Kimura's work became characterized by a ruthless disregard for naturalistic colour and design that often went beyond the already infamous modernist designs of Ken Adam in the James Bond series, who described his work as merely 'heightened reality'.<sup>56</sup> Kimura thus advanced considerably Suzuki's differential style, and with this partnership, an essential and dedicated *kumi* had finally coalesced around Suzuki. The *kumi* would soon be joined by future directors Yasuhara Hasebe, Yamatoya Atsushi, Sone Chūsei and screenwriter Tanaka Yōzō. Over the next three years this *kumi* would develop into a loose and unauthorized creative clique at Nikkatsu, headed by Suzuki and Kimura. With the punning pseudonym of *Guryū Hachirō* ('Group of Eight'), the group conceived and wrote several screenplays while discussing the evolution of film language from within the studio system in a more organized fashion than the early *nuberu bagu* had done. Suzuki's 1967 masterpiece *Koroshi no rakuin* (screenplay by 'Guryū Hachirō') was the only formal product of this alliance, but its covert influence was tremendous, particularly on the later work of Yamatoya, Sone, and Hasebe when, in an extension Suzuki's style, they defined the aesthetics of Nikkatsu's *roman poruno* genre.<sup>57</sup>

By mid-1963, independent exploitation films featuring sex and nudity (including the first films of Wakamatsu Kōji) were beginning to steal the crucial young male demographic audience away from major studios, which were already suffering from competition with television. A hard-boiled thriller, *Yajū no seishun/Youth of the*

<sup>55</sup> Suzuki in *Asian Cult Cinema* v. 21, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> From the documentary *Inside Doctor No*, originally published for the MGM DVD release of the film in 2000 and available on most subsequent video editions.

<sup>57</sup> Some formative films of the Nikkatsu *roman poruno* genre include Hasebe's *Nora neko rokku/Stray Cat Rock* series, featuring superstar Kaji Meiko, especially *Sekkusu hantā/Sex Hunter* (1970), and Sone's *Seidan botan-dōrō/Hellish Love* (1972).

*Beast* (1963) was assigned to Suzuki by Nikkatsu management as an experiment in a film with an adults only certificate. After Suzuki had made the film, Nikkatsu changed its mind about the rating, thus causing problems with *Eirin*, the industry censorship board. Despite this, a unique crime film emerged that bordered on the avant-garde, marked by extreme violence filmed at laconic distance and lavish stylization involving the play of sound and silence, primary and pastel colours, and shifts of colour and black and white. The film made popular character actor Shishido Jō into a dramatic lead, and over the course of their eight-film collaboration he often appeared as the director's tough but insecure alter ego. One critic reported that the film disappeared with little review and indifferent word of mouth (at least in establishment circles),<sup>58</sup> but positive reviews in *Eiga hyōron* and *Kinema junpō* showed a new consciousness of authorial style: 'Suzuki has borrowed the framework of Nikkatsu action, and has moulded his own aesthetic universe,' wrote Nakahira Yumihiko, for the former.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the film inspired the first feature article on the director in a major film magazine, 'The Beauty of Suzuki Seijun' by Kajiwara Ryūji. Kajiwara marvelled that Suzuki's non-diegetic stylization in a B-movie was 'ridiculed' by some audiences while the stylization of Kurosawa or Ichikawa was treated as the mark of a great director.<sup>60</sup> He found beauty in Suzuki's bold, gaudy colours and theatricality, but also found the films 'refreshing' compared to Nikkatsu's *akushon* formula in that they treated both violence and eroticism relatively seriously. This was evidence of a sea-change in popular film criticism: *Eiga hyōron* went on to champion Suzuki as a major filmmaker throughout the rest of the decade.<sup>61</sup> Suzuki followed *Yajū no Seishun* with *Kantō mushuku/Kanto*

<sup>58</sup> Review by Nakahara Yumihiko, *Eiga hyōron* (July 1963), pp. 34-5.

<sup>59</sup> Nakahara, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> *Eiga hyōron* (July 1964), reprinted in Motomura Shūji, ed. *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū*, pp. 120-2

<sup>61</sup> Not all of the magazine's articles were laudatory: Kazuki Ryōsuke's article 'Suzuki Seijun yo, ongaku ni motto

*Wanderer*, perhaps the director's first 'serious' *yakuza* film (a genre which came into being virtually simultaneously) but also a haunting trip into memory, dream, and erotic longing. The participation of superstar Kobayashi Akira, who remained loyal to Suzuki from his early career days, undoubtedly helped the director's position at Nikkatsu. Hasumi Shigehiko has noted that, with *Kantō mushuku* as the B-feature to the most critically and financially successful film of the year, Imamura's *Nippon Konchūki*/*Insect Woman* (1963), Suzuki received more positive critical exposure than ever before; and yet still the establishment critics awarded *Kantō mushuku* only 29<sup>th</sup> place on the *Kinema junpō*'s poll of the year's best films.<sup>62</sup> Suzuki was still a minor, 'alternative' figure.

In 1964, Nikkatsu succeeded in producing an 'adults only' film with Suzuki's *Nikutai no mon*/*Gate of Flesh*, a highly erotic adaptation of Tamura Taijirō's seminal 1948 novel about prostitution amongst the ruins of post-war Tokyo, a novel which extolled the abandonment of tradition and the revolutionary potential of female sexuality. Suzuki's oneiric style and Kimura's expressionist sets might have annoyed Nikkatsu had not *Nikutai no mon* become Suzuki's greatest commercial success. But the conservative media establishment refused to catch on: with his films still ignored by the daily papers, *Nikutai no mon* (and its 1965 'sequel' of sorts, *Shunpuden*/*Story of a Prostitute*, a damning portrait of the wartime military based on the Tamura story of that name) was widely excoriated by offended reviewers.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Suzuki had become a recognized filmmaker.

From 1964-1966, while Suzuki completed the 'Flesh Trilogy' that began with *Nikutai no mon* (and starred his own discovery, the actress Nogawa Yumiko) and

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*aijō wo...* (Suzuki Seijun, *Love Music a Little More...*), *Eiga hyōron* (Nov. 1964), is a highly ambivalent treatment which accuses the director lack of regard for compositional 'harmony': pp. 85-86.

<sup>62</sup> Hasumi 'A World Without Seasons in Hasumi (1991), p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> For example, *Kinema junpō* no. 370 (Late July 1964), pp. 80-81, *Kinema junpō* no. 388 (Early April 1965), p. 87; Kazuki in *Eiga hyōron* (Nov. 1964), who accused Suzuki of sadism (p. 86); Sano Mitsuo, 'Koroshiya to shunpu no aida no kyōkōsei (Fictionality Amidst Killers and Whores)', *Eiga geijutsu* (May 1965), pp. 49-50.

produced a sequence of four *yakuza* pictures ending with *Tokyo nagaremono/Tokyo Drifter* (1966), a number of articles appeared in *Eiga geijutsu* as well *Eiga hyōron*, with even *Kinema junpō* allowing a feature, in 1966, that compared Suzuki to the popular Tōei director Katō Tai.<sup>64</sup> Critics also mentioned in passing the existence of ‘Seijun fans’.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, we can say that students who had grown up with B-pictures by Nakahira, Tai Katō, Okamoto and others, unburdened by dependence on the classical cinematic norms of the first post-war decade, accepted Suzuki’s differential style with little trouble, especially when it captured their favoured stars, like Kobayashi, in iconic postures. They evidently viewed his comic ironies as an entertaining, if not typical, aspect of Nikkatsu *akushon*.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Nikkatsu, Tōei, and Tōhō action films that male students adored, some of them made by Suzuki’s former associates, began to ‘catch up’ to Suzuki’s non-diegetic stylization by 1967, particularly in their use of non-diegetic colour and jump cuts.

Suzuki had by now acquired enough clout at Nikkatsu to supervise scripting and editing, even rewriting his scripts from scratch on occasion.<sup>67</sup> Nikkatsu management however, was far from satisfied. ‘I got warned about *Gate of Flesh*, too! By that time, I was getting warned every time I made a picture!...One producer used to come up to me every time I finished a film and say “Okay this is it. You can’t do anything more. You’ve gone too far.”’<sup>68</sup> *Tokyo nagaremono*, now considered a prescient work of generic pastiche and urban cultural hybridity, might well have been the last straw for Nikkatsu, who wanted a simple pop song film to promote their new star, Watari

<sup>64</sup> Shirai Yoshio and Iijima Tetsuo, ‘*Nihon eiga no ransei “itanji”*’ (The *Enfants Terribles* of Japanese Cinema’s Troubled Times), *Kinema junpō* no. 440 (June 1967), pp. 41-46; Iijima Tetsuo, ‘Katō Tai to Suzuki Seijun: insaido de wa hanasakanu ninin no Taishō senchūha (Katō Tai and Suzuki Seijun: On the Inside, Two Men of the Taishō War Generation Who Did not Bloom)’, *Eiga geijutsu* (March 1967) pp. 36-38; a lengthy feature interview with Suzuki and his *kumi* in by Satō Tadao in *Eiga hyōron* (Nov. 1966), pp. 19-36.

<sup>65</sup> Ishigami Mitsutoshi, ‘*Tokyo nagaremono igo he*’ *Eiga hyōron* (August 1966), in Motomura, ed., *Seijun Suzuki sōtokushū*, p. 131; cf. Satō, *Nihon eigashi vol. 3* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, translated by Gregory Barrett (Kodansha 1983), p. 227.

<sup>67</sup> Suzuki in Isoda and Todoroki, pp. 274, 277 (on *Tokyo nagaremono*); Shindō Kaneto on *Kenka erejii* (1967) in Motomura, ed., *Seijun Suzuki sōtokushū*, p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> in Desjardins, p. 148.

Tetsuya.<sup>69</sup> The film was panned by an uncomprehending *Kinema junpō*,<sup>70</sup> and Suzuki's only supporter, Emori, was fired. However, his next film *Kenka erejii*, a black comedy of militarization and sexual repression in the 1930s, received strong support from many film publications, even *Kinema junpō*, who also published the screenplay (originally written by the leftist filmmaker Shindō Kaneto).<sup>71</sup> The critic Yamaguchi Tetsu praised that the war generation could recognize their own experiences in Suzuki's film, and a manner in which to talk about them.<sup>72</sup>

### *The Suzuki Problem of 1968*

In early 1967, Hori Kyūsaku removed a film from his release schedule and directed Suzuki to come up with a replacement in only a few months. Suzuki and Guryū Hachirō capitalised on the situation to make their most extreme film yet, *Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill*, a spatially disorienting, sexually explicit, temporally circuitous and fatalistic thriller about a brutal killer who challenges the system and is, in turn, crushed by it. Hori was outraged by this film which, having no promotional support from Nikkatsu, was a box office failure (albeit an inexpensive one). This gave Hori the excuse he needed, and while Suzuki was working on a television film (*Aisaikun konban wa: Aru kettō/ Good Evening Dear Husband: A Duel*) in April 1968, he learned from a secretary that he had been fired.<sup>73</sup>

The resulting controversy, which galvanized fans and filmmakers, has been called the 'Suzuki Seijun Problem' of 1968 and was a surprising component of the nationwide student demonstrations and revolts that rocked Japan in May and June of

<sup>69</sup> In Isoda and Todoroki, pp. 74-80.

<sup>70</sup> Itoyama Hiroshi, *Kinema junpō* no. 415 (May 1966), p. 62.

<sup>71</sup> Ogawa Yoshiyuki, *Kinema junpō* no. 430 (Jan. 1967), p. 121; *Kinema junpō* no. 428 (Dec. 1966), pp. 107-126.

<sup>72</sup> *Wakaki hi no Seijun no shōzō* (Portrait of Seijun's Youth), *Eiga hyōron* (Feb. 1967), reprinted in Motomura, ed., *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū*, p. 131.

<sup>73</sup> Ueno Kōshi, 'Suzuki Battles Nikkatsu' in Alastair Phillips, ed., *The Films of Seijun Suzuki* (Edinburgh Festival Program, 1988), p. 40.

that year.<sup>74</sup> When approached on Suzuki's behalf, Hori insultingly said that 'Suzuki's films do not make money...therefore they are not good. Suzuki is no good as a director....he should open up a noodle shop or something instead.'<sup>75</sup> As it turned out, Kawakita Kazuko—director of the Ciné Club, the most prominent film society in Tokyo with connections to the avant-garde scene and the Art Theatre Guild (ATG), a new producer and distributor for *nuberu bagu* directors— had requested prints of Suzuki's film for the first retrospective of the director's career. Hori refused, responding to Kawakita that it reflected badly on Nikkatsu to show such 'incomprehensible' films aimed at an 'exclusive audience', and that the prints were 'prohibited' from any further screenings whatsoever.<sup>76</sup> Hori's public behaviour, based on his personal assumption that Suzuki's films were irritating, demonstrated that the studio and its pre-war management were out of touch with the times, comprehending neither the tastes nor the culture of its urban, largely male, audience. More importantly, what had started as an internal contract dispute had now become a question of the censorship and perhaps destruction of a filmmaker's work.<sup>77</sup> When Suzuki reported his contract termination to the Association of Japanese Film Directors, their leaders tried and failed to negotiate with Hori, and then publicly condemned his behaviour as a violation of constitutional rights to creative freedom.<sup>78</sup> One June 7 Suzuki sued Nikkatsu for approximately 7,000,000 yen for breach of contract and personal damages and demanded a public apology. The Ciné Club, ATG,

<sup>74</sup> Publications referred to the firing and ensuing controversy as either the *Suzuki Seijun mondai* (Suzuki Seijun Problem) or the *Suzuki Seijun jiken* (Suzuki Seijun Affair); for example, Kawarabata Yasushi, *Eiga hyōron* 28:6 (1971) 'Suzuki Seijun mondai repōto: wakai kōshō he ba wo utsusu' (Report on the Suzuki Problem: Approaching Preliminary Negotiations), pp. 60-62.

<sup>75</sup> translated by Daisuke Miyao in Miyao, "Dark Visions of Japanese Film Noir: Suzuki Seijun's *Branded To Kill*," in Alistair Phillips and Julian Stringer, eds., *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 194-5.

<sup>76</sup> translated in Miyao, p. 194, and Lisa Spalding in Phillips., ed. *The Film of Seijun Suzuki*, p. 40.

<sup>77</sup> The initial published statement of the 'Joint Struggle Committee for the Problems of Suzuki Seijun' founded on July 13<sup>th</sup> directly accused Nikkatsu of violation of author's copyright as well as oppression of creative artists: Ueno, pp. 222-223. The final legal settlement with Nikkatsu included a donation of *Koroshi no rakuin* and *Kenka erejii* to the National Film Centre in Tokyo (p. 227); this undoubtedly reflected concerns amongst Suzuki's supporters that a vindictive Nikkatsu might destroy or 'bury' the prints of Suzuki's films.

<sup>78</sup> Ueno in Phillips, p. 40.

the Actor's and Scriptwriter's Guilds and various student political organizations helped Suzuki organize a press conference on that day. This was followed by a demonstration of hundreds of protestors in front of Nikkatsu's offices in Hibiya on June 12,<sup>79</sup> including prominent industry figures as well as radical and Marxist student groups wearing red helmets.<sup>80</sup> A 'Joint Committee for the Problem of Suzuki Seijun' was formed, and the Suzuki Problem ballooned as the student Left seized upon it as an opportunity to attack the authoritarian corporate and government nexus that had ruled Japan since the end of the Occupation. Suzuki also received active public support at various stages from prominent artists such as Ōshima, Shinoda, avant-garde impresario Terayama Shūji, and Director's Association president Gosho Heinosuke. He also received tacit support from Kurosawa and Mishima Yukio.<sup>81</sup>

In July Hori had revealed that Nikkatsu studios was in enormous debt and that a sizable percentage of staff were to be laid off. Based on the evidence considered by Ueno Kōshi in his book *Suzuki Seijun zen eiga*, it seems clear that Suzuki was both an economic scapegoat for the troubled Nikkatsu and the centre of a real ideological and generational clash between two mutually exclusive views of the cinema: a classical, narrative cinema based on the Hollywood model aimed at an imaginary *general* audience which had been now lost to television, and a 'modernist' cinema which excited a younger audience tending towards cinephilia.<sup>82</sup>

Suzuki's court case dragged on until December 1971 and involved nineteen witnesses. Between 1968 and that time, *Kinema junpō* and especially *Eiga hyōron* published several updates on the developing Suzuki Problem.<sup>83</sup> The circumstances

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<sup>79</sup> Ueno in Phillips, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Ueno, pp. 221-2.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Hubert Niogret, *Positif* (June 1990), p. 26

<sup>82</sup> *Eiga hyōron* (August 1968) specially featured a series of three articles comparing the Suzuki Affair with the Langlois Affair in Paris, pp. 59-92.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Kanai Toshio, 'Tokubetsu repo: Shine-kurabu to Suzuki Seijun jōei mondai' (Special Report on Problems Screening Suzuki Seijun's Works), *Kinema junpō* no. 469 (June 1968), pp. 92-94; Kawarabata



of the production of *Koroshi no rakuin*, which Hori had personally ordered to be made, were damning, but perhaps not as much as the now-public knowledge of Hori's shocking financial mismanagement of the studio.<sup>84</sup> However, Suzuki was forced to accept an underwhelming settlement of 1,000,000 yen out of fear that Nikkatsu would soon become insolvent.<sup>85</sup> Despite the settlement, Suzuki's challenge to the studio system had already met with reprisals. In 1969 the five major film studios declared a blacklist on Suzuki. Unable to direct, Suzuki turned to commercials and, more regularly, writing. His many books, beginning with *Kenka erejii* (1970), combined impressionistic essays, cultural observation, biographical sketches, and interviews. Suzuki would continue to write books until the end of the 1990s, though very few memoirs or discussions of his actual film work.

#### *Late Suzuki, 1977-2005*

Ironically, despite blacklisting and financial desperation, Suzuki had become the most famous of Japanese directors. The period 1969-1981 was a golden age of Suzuki criticism, with several feature articles in major and minor film magazines and,<sup>86</sup> eventually, articles in general arts publications such as *Bijutsu techō*, *Kokubungaku*, *Bungei*, and *Asahi Journal*.<sup>87</sup> *Kinema junpō*, by now fully converted to supporting the director, published a multi-part memoir by Kimura Takeo, full of personal anecdote and provocatively entitled 'To Shoot a Film For Suzuki Seijun

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Yasushi, 'Suzuki Seijun jiken repōto: sakka ni osareta Koroshi no rakuin (Report on the Suzuki Seijun Affair: Branded to Kill Branded on the Author)', *Eiga hyōron* 25:7 (1968), pp. 18-21.

<sup>84</sup> Ueno in Phillips, p. 40.

<sup>85</sup> Ueno in Phillips, p. 40. The studios were gradually sold off throughout the legal dispute, and in 1971, Nikkatsu removed Hori and announced that they would exclusively produce soft-core pornography, or *roman poruno*.

<sup>86</sup> For but a few examples, Sone Yoshitada, 'Suzuki Seijun-ron: utae, odore' (The Theory of Suzuki: Dance, Sing), *Eiga geijutsu* no. 255 (Nov. 1968), pp. 52-54; Roland Lethem, 'Suzuki Seijun to Nikutai no mon,' *Eiga hyōron* (Jan. 1969), pp. 42-47; Ueno Kōshi, 'Rojin ga rojin de aru tame ni ha: shinario [Iken] he no Suzuki Seijun no michinori' (Lu Xun for his own sake: Suzuki Seijun's road to the screenplay 'Iken'), *Eiga hihyō* (Nov. 1970), pp. 63-75.

<sup>87</sup> Hatano Tetsurō, 'Haigono nia sekai' (A World Without a Backdrop), *Bijutsu techō*, no. 398 (Sept. 1975), pp. 235-247; Tayama Rikiya, 'Bi no seiri: Suzuki Seijun,' *Kokubungaku* v. 22 (June 25, 1977), p. 155-57; Kanai Mieko, *Bungei* v. 9 (1981) pp. 186-189; 'Suzuki Seijun san: damashiai ni ikiru eiga kantoku' (Suzuki-san: A Film Director Who Lives for Trickery,' *Asahi Journal* 23 (1981), pp. 92-97.

This Year!'.<sup>88</sup> Satō Tadao, the *Eiga hyōron* founder, included a chapter on Suzuki in his seminal book *Nihon eiga shisōshi*,<sup>89</sup> while a younger generation of prominent Japanese film critics, including Hasumi Shigehiko, Ueno Kōshi, Yamane Sadao, and Nishikawa Hideo, emerged as a sort of core group of supporters and interpreters of Suzuki's work. However, it was not his critical reputation but his *Guryū Hachirō* assistants who kept Suzuki in business. Yamatoya, Sone, Tanaka, and others (comprising the last generation of Nikkatsu studio filmmakers before the collapse of the industry) connected Suzuki to directing jobs on anthology television, notably for the CM network.<sup>90</sup> His most important collaboration was as director of two episodes of the second *Rupin sansei/Lupin III* TV anime series (1977-1980), based on the influential manga series by Monkey Punch. This led, in turn, to Suzuki supervising the big screen adventure *Rupin sansei: Babiron no ōgon densetsu/Lupin III: Golden Legend of Babylon* (1986). As Donald Richie has inferred, the conceptual association of Suzuki's aesthetic with popular manga and anime (Miyazaki Hayao was a frequent collaborator to the series) gave Suzuki a critical cachet and staying power with younger spectators who had not seen his Nikkatsu films.<sup>91</sup>

During frequent dry periods, Suzuki would meet at his house with his former subordinates to discuss the creation of a 'new kind of film.'<sup>92</sup> Yamatoya Atsushi adapted a script from popular manga artist Kajiwara Ikki, about the media creation of a golf pro, and convinced Shōchiku to allow Suzuki to direct the film. In 1977, a decade after *Koroshi no rakuin*, Suzuki returned to cinema with *Hishū monogatari/A Tale of Sorrow*. *Eiga geijutsu* heralded the return of a 'master' with on-set visits,

<sup>88</sup> *Kinema junpō* no. 627 (March 1974) to no. 650 (Late February 1975)

<sup>89</sup> published in 1970 by Sanichi shobō.

<sup>90</sup> Ueno, *Suzuki Seijun zen eiga*, pp. 230-242.

<sup>91</sup> Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Cinema*, p. 181.

<sup>92</sup> Interview included on the 2006 Kino DVD of *Zigeunerweisen* (ASIN: B000E1MY6S).

interviews, retrospective essays and screenplay publications.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately *Hishū monogatari* demonstrated a filmmaker no longer willing or able to operate within the aesthetic or ideological confines of established media. Revisiting the avant-garde style of *Koroshi no rakuin*, Suzuki also bit the hand that fed him and produced a devastating and bitter satire of television and its effect on subjectivity. The film's remarkable lead, Harada Yoshio, would collaborate with Suzuki on four subsequent projects, but reviews and box office were close to disastrous.

With the 'failure' of *Hishū*, it was something of a miracle that Yamatoya's former producer Arato Genjirō, who had made his career in avant-garde political theatre, suddenly offered Suzuki and his friends *carte blanche* to produce a low budget film. Suzuki and Tanaka Yōzō chose to adapt the oneiric novella *Sarasate no ban/The Sarasate Record* (1952) by the Taishō/Shōwa writer Uchida Hyakken. For the resulting film *Zigeunerweisen*, Suzuki and his former Nikkatsu collaborators Kimura, Nagatsuka, and Suzuki Akira capitalized on the Japanese fascination with ghost stories to create a project concerned with irrational erotic obsession, the haunting presence of Japan's pre-modern past, and the cinematic representation of time. Several articles in literary and art journals as well as film periodicals followed upon good word of mouth,<sup>94</sup> and Suzuki's film ended up winning every major award that year including the number one spot of *Kinema junpō's* Best Ten. In another first, Suzuki's film entered and won the Jury Prize at the Berlin Film Festival. Overnight, Suzuki had become the inheritor of several now defunct legacies: the independent cinema, the *nuberu bagu*, and the avant-garde theatre world of the late 1960s. More than ever, Suzuki felt free to explore his fascination with pre-war history through a cinema of painterly images, influenced by Taishō theatre and surrealism and

<sup>93</sup> *Eiga geijutsu* no.27 (April 1977), pp. 31-46; no. 29 (June 1977), pp. 31-47; no. 31 (August 1977), pp. 39-117.

<sup>94</sup> For example, *Āto shiata* (Art Theatre) no. 144 (January 1981), pp. 8-30, 38-60; Akiyama Kiyoshi, *Nihon eiga kenkyū* 4 (May 1981) pp. 4-6; Kanai Mieko, *Bungei* v. 20 (September 1981), pp. 186-9.

unencumbered by narrative causality. With Aratō's company, Cinema Placet, he made two more avant-garde epics of the Taishō era, *Kagerō-za* (1981) (from the famous story *Shunchū* by Meiji writer Izumi Kyōka), and *Yumeji* (1991), a fantasia on the life of the painter Yumeji Takehisa (1884-1934).

In between, Suzuki directed another radical deconstruction of the crime film, *Kapone ōi ni naku/Capone Cries a Lot*, but this film, like *Yumeji*, did not repeat the critical impact of *Zigeunerweisen*. Nevertheless, Suzuki's films were for the first time beginning to be shown around the world; there were retrospectives at the Pesaro Film Festival in 1984 and the Edinburgh Festival in 1988, followed by Vancouver, London, Rotterdam, San Francisco, San Paolo, New York, Melbourne, and Bologna throughout the 1990s. These screenings influenced a new generation of international filmmakers (such as Jim Jarmusch) as well as emerging Japanese directors Miike Takashi, Aoyama Shinji, and Kurosawa Kiyoshi, among others.<sup>95</sup> In a reversal of fortune, Suzuki's films, along with those of his contemporary genre director Fukusaku Kinji, came to be seen as a greater influence on contemporary East Asian cinema than the films of the 1960s *nuberu bagu*.<sup>96</sup> In this climate, Suzuki (at 77) produced a sort of synthesis of *Koroshi no rakuin* and the aesthetics of the Taishō trilogy, this time with a female assassin as protagonist. A modest *succes d'estime* in Japan, *Pisutoru opera* (2001) was the first Suzuki film to be reviewed upon release by major American periodicals such as the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Reader* (in which Jonathon Rosenbaum enthusiastically praised the film).<sup>97</sup> Over the next

<sup>95</sup> Stephen Teo, 'Suzuki Seijun: Authority in Minority'. *Senses of Cinema* [Online Journal] (July 2000), <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/festival-reports/suzuki/>; *Style to Kill: Koroshi no rakuin bijuaru direkutori* (Tokyo: Puchigura Publishing, 2001), pp. A17-A27; Chuck Stephens, 'Kiyoshi Kurosawa Begins at the End,' *New York Times* (24 July 2001).

<sup>96</sup> Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* p. 95-6, Stephen Teo, 'Authority in Minority.'

<sup>97</sup> 'Bullet Ballet,' *Chicago Reader* (22 August 2003), <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2013/10/bullet-ballet/>. The American reception of Suzuki's later films was conditioned by a continuous string of DVD releases (from 1999 to 2009) of Suzuki's Nikkatsu and Cinema Placet films from prestige-oriented distributors such as Criterion, Home Vision, and Kino.

three years Suzuki gathered the finances for his final film to date, the musical *Opereta tanuki goten/Princess Raccoon* (2005). A remake of Suzuki's favourite Japanese film, the 1939 *Operetta Tanuki goten* by Kimura Keigo, the film was truly international, featuring Chinese superstar Ziyi Zhang and audaciously using international pop songs and CGI recreations to present another fantasia on Japanese mythology. The film saw multiple releases throughout Asia and Europe and premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (another first for the octogenarian director). This international presence of Suzuki as *auteur* and the availability of his films on DVD have stimulated, in the last decade, a slow but continuous wave of popular and scholarly re-evaluation. Popular film criticism in Japan, marked by overwhelming nostalgia for the heyday of Nikkatsu (the era of Ishihara Yūjirō) has tended to focus on Suzuki as a (somewhat differential) representative of the studio flavour. Popular criticism in English, often in lieu of adequate contextual information, has treated Suzuki, with his recognizable visual style, as the ultimate example of a 'cult' director—the discourse of the 'cult' filmmaker being, in the end, a kind of *auteur* discourse within a popular idiom. Neither of these is adequate. What remains to be redeemed is a director who can be pigeonholed neither as 'cult/genre *auteur*' nor as a journeyman of the Nikkatsu house style, but a director whose prescient and idiosyncratic transformation of narrative film language anticipated and instigated transnational developments, carrying a historical and philosophical weight comparable to the work of Antonioni or Kurosawa before him, Godard and Ōshima after him.

### CHAPTER THREE: FROM *Noir* TO COLOUR: THE EARLY FILMS OF SUZUKI (1956-1962)

#### *Introduction*

Between 1959-1960, Ōshima Nagisa, Shinoda Masahiro, and Yoshida Yoshishige, the major directors of the much-publicized *nuberu bagu* (the Japanese New Wave at Shōchiku studios), made their respective debut films. Even though Suzuki Seijun had been an assistant director at Shōchiku senior to these three, no one in 1960 within Japan's filmmaking or critical establishment would have considered that Suzuki belonged to the same aesthetic universe as the *nuberu bagu*. Few critics were aware that Suzuki existed except as a screen credit on Nikkatsu's B-pictures. In comparison, Ōshima was a prominent film critic who received acclaim for his second film (*Seishun zankoku monogatari/Cruel Story of Youth*, 1960); the early films of Shinoda and Yoshida received attention in film magazines as Japan's answer to the already legendary directors of the French *nouvelle vague*, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. The *nuberu bagu* enjoyed instant notoriety, not least because of Shōchiku's publicity machine: this meant that the directors were 'instant *auteurs*' with public cachet.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, Suzuki, like his Nikkatsu mentor Noguchi Hiroshi, toiled through low budget crime films and teenage pop song films (*kayō eiga*) with second-rate Nikkatsu stars, receiving indifferent financial success and no media attention whatsoever.<sup>2</sup> His films served as the second half of a double feature at Nikkatsu theatres. Despite their status as lowbrow popular fare for the masses,

<sup>1</sup> cf. Maureen Turim's brief comments on Shōchiku's establishment and marketing of the *nuberu bagu*, a subject of study that remains astonishingly underdeveloped amongst film scholars in the West: Turim, *the Films of Ōshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* (Univ. of California Berkeley, 1998), pp. 12-14, 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> Ōshima himself, it should be noted, began his career as a critic with a (soon-discarded) interest in studio 'bread and butter' B-pictures; Ōshima, *Cinema, Censorship and the State*, edited by Maureen Turim, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 21-25.

reviews in the popular press were incredibly infrequent. Meanwhile, Suzuki was being outpaced by younger Nikkatsu directors such as Imamura Shōhei and the intellectual, profoundly Godardian Kurahara Koreyoshi (another former Shōchiku Assistant Director), who became a top-ranking director after his first film, the Ishihara vehicle *Ore wa matteriru ze/I am Waiting* in 1957.<sup>3</sup> For more than 30 years, Kurahara and Suzuki shared the same editor, the unsung Suzuki Akira, with the two directors reacting competitively to each other's work through this essential intermediary: 'Maybe Kurahara uses too much film,' judged Suzuki.<sup>4</sup>

It took until 1963, seven years after he started as a director, for a tiny circle of critics to recognize the director of *Yajū no seishun/Youth of the Beast* and *Kantō mushuku/Kanto Wanderer* (1963) as a figure of aesthetic interest. In 1970, Satō Tadao established the orthodox view that Suzuki had made only 'routine job assignments' in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> At that time, Satō had little means of reviewing those early films. I will argue, in contrast, that the 'hard-boiled' B-crime films of the 1950s are some of Japan's most significant and transformative genre films. Derived from American thrillers, their transnational stylistic and cultural hybridity enabled the young director Suzuki to risk occasional experiments unheard of in the studio cinema of the 1950s. In these films, as discussed in Part One of this chapter, Suzuki pioneered the use of jump cuts, problematised the cinematic gaze through visual allegories of the mediation of the camera, and utilized eccentric widescreen framing as a meta-textual commentary on filmmaking practice. In Part Two, I argue further that Suzuki's occasional experiments with colour, even in his pop song films, represent a break with classical filmmaking of equal conceptual significance to the early films of the *nuberu bagu*. In

<sup>3</sup> Mark Schilling, *No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (Godalming: FAB Press, 2008), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup> 'Forgetting Foreign Names' in Suzuki Seijun and Hasumi Shigehiko, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem/Suzuki Seijun: the desert under the cherry blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, trans. Gregory Barrett (Tokyo, Kodansha 1983), p. 226.

the conclusion, I also discuss how in 1960 Suzuki made one film which can be considered, topically and aesthetically, as part of both the *nuberu bagu* and the *taiyōzoku* cycle; *Subete ga kurutteru/Everything Goes Crazy* explored the youth-oriented social realism of Kurahara and Imamura's films, to which it is a kind of riposte, being as audacious in form and as radical in its critique as the *nuberu bagu* films on the subject.

Yet despite this realist and discursive 'social problem' film, by 1962 Suzuki had gone on to achieve a kind of self-reflexive filmmaking practice, openly impatient with the formulaic genre material he was given to work with, yet at the same time contemplative of the phenomenology and politics of the erotic and violent representations that had made genre films so indispensable to the public. This reflexivity pulled Suzuki away from the social realism of *Subete ga kurutteru* towards an 'ironic-generic' practice, that is, one which reinvests in the potential of cinematic spectacle by bending it towards a critique of the mass culture and media establishment which produced it: that very establishment within which Suzuki, the quintessential underappreciated artist, had found himself trapped and alone.

## I. HARD-BOILED WONDERLAND

Between 1957 and 1958, the distinct authorial voice of Suzuki emerged from his imitation of the hard-boiled crime films of his mentor at Nikkatsu, Noguchi Hiroshi.<sup>6</sup> While appreciating the influence of Noguchi, I shall illustrate the emergence of Suzuki's differential style in two early hard-boiled thrillers that he made with the stars Mizushima Michitarō and Shiraki Mari: *Rajo to kenjū/Nude Girl and a Gun* (1957) and *Ankokugai no bijo/Underworld Beauty* (1958).

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<sup>6</sup> Ueno Kōshi, ed., *Seijun Suzuki Zen Eiga* (Tokyo: Rippu shobō, 1986), p. 120.



Firstly, I want to justify my use of the term ‘hard-boiled’ to mark some dozens of unsentimental, black and white Japanese crime films from the 1950s. Even though Suzuki has used the Japanese equivalent (*hādo-boirudo*) to describe his own crime films,<sup>7</sup> my use of the term to describe this cycle of films from the mid-to late 1950s is not necessarily warranted by the critical discourses of the time. Rather, I am attempting to classify a cycle of films that has *never* been properly classified or analysed by Japanese film history. Certainly, film magazines were using the term *hādo-boirudo* by 1960 to describe the generic affiliation of not only Suzuki’s films, but those of contemporaries such as Okamoto Kihachi,<sup>8</sup> while *Eiga hyōron* compared Suzuki to the hard-boiled writer Hadley Chase.<sup>9</sup> The Nikkatsu historian Watanabe Tadenobu classified the studio crime thrillers starring Shishido Jō from 1963-1967 as a *hādo-boirudo* cycle, but he did not give a name or classification to the earlier 1950s crime films dominated by Noguchi, nor did he consider similar films made at other studios. Critics often referred to these earlier films as *gangu mono* (gangster subjects), but the term is too general and somewhat misleading.<sup>10</sup> Crime thrillers of the 1950s conspicuously did *not* attempt to represent the culture of the *yakuza* gangs (no doubt for fear of causing offence).<sup>11</sup> Thus I have chosen *hādo-boirudo* as the best historical term available to describe this group of films. Despite terminological confusion, this is a significant body of at least twenty to thirty studio films, produced under the influence of a wave of American popular literature and media exported to Japan

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Tony Rayns (28 June 2006), available on the 2007 Yume Pictures DVD release of *Tokyo Drifter* (ASIN: B000J4PGQU).

<sup>8</sup> Satō Shigeomi, review of *Ankokugai no taiketsu*, *Eiga geijutsu* v. 8:3 (1960), p. 73; Fukasawa Tetsuya, Review of *Yajū no seishun*, *Kinema junpō* no. 347 (June 1963), p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Nakahara Yumihiko, Review of *Yajū no seishun*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> For example, *Kinema junpō*’s review (Late Oct. 1958) of Noguchi’s *Jigoku no satsutaba/Bankroll from Hell* (1958) refers to the film as *gangu mono* and to Noguchi generally as a director of *gangu mono*; Fukasawa’s review of Suzuki’s *Hachi jikan no kyōfu/8 Hours of Terror* (*Kinema junpō* no. 172, Early April 1957), p. 109, also used the term. The *katakana* (borrowed) term *gangu* seems to have signified more the Americanized, movie-fantasy crime syndicates that appeared in Nikkatsu’s films of the 1950s than the native *yakuza* milieu which appeared later.

<sup>11</sup> Noguchi’s *Chitei no uta/Song of the Underworld* (1956) and Yamamoto Kajirō’s *Ankokugai/Underworld* (Tōhō 1956) are some notable exceptions.

throughout the decade, producing an initially imitative, then dynamic and evolving cycle.

The hard-boiled literary movement in America has a well-defined time and place of origin. Despite its long roots in ‘sensationalized American pulp fiction addressed chiefly to working-class men,’<sup>12</sup> hard-boiled fiction came into the world in 1923 through the writings of Dashiell Hammett and *Black Mask Magazine* under the editorship of Jack ‘Captain’ Shaw. One of the major qualities which differentiated Hammett from the ‘gentlemanly’ detective fiction which came before him was the terse, vernacular, quasi-objective diction that Hammett adapted from the modernist styles of Hemingway and H.L. Mencken. Originally, the term ‘hard-boiled’ focused exclusively on the tough character of the urban private detective. The twin emphasis of this literature, then, was on the detective himself and on the journey of investigation into society’s hidden corners. However, as the decades progressed, ‘hard-boiled’ came into a broader usage and denoted a larger variety of crime thriller scenarios.<sup>13</sup> In the 1940s, Raymond Chandler could speak in a very general sense about gritty Hollywood crime melodramas such as when he wrote that ‘people can take the hard-boiled stuff nowadays.’<sup>14</sup> And it was this more encompassing use of the term that some Japanese critics would adapt, as *hādo-boirudo*, to describe the vigorous crime literature and film coming out of post-war Tokyo.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1998), p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> For example, James M. Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1936) have little to do with private detectives, yet are widely considered as examples of ‘hard-boiled’: Naremore, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> Gene D. Phillips, *Out of the Shadows* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), pp. 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> Japan in the 1920s had seen an expanding readership in detective thrillers and *policiers*, partially the result of translations of American and European detective stories of earlier decades. This in turn resulted in a series of urban police and detection films by the *Toa kinema* company. Neither the literature or films of the time resembled the hard-boiled work of Hammett; for production reasons, the films were largely confined to interiors, perhaps unwittingly reproducing the ‘drawing room’ mysteries of Conan Doyle et al, while the protagonists tended to be police detectives and establishment figures, rather than private eyes: Komatsu Hiroshi, ‘Representations of the Dark World in Japanese Silent Cinema,’ in Roberto Cueto, ed., *Japón en negro* (Festival Internacional de cine de Donostia-San Sebastian, S.A., 2008), p. 279. Moreover the great ideological and cultural police purges of 1928 contributed greatly to diminishing the influence of American literature so that Japanese detective literature and film was not as profoundly affected by new American literary imports as they were by American movies. Hammett’s great hard-boiled novels *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) appeared too late to

From 1950 to 1955, an influx of translations of American crime stories descended on the Japanese reading public alongside the films of Humphrey Bogart and other stars who gained iconic status in Japan. With thirty years of American literary developments introduced in one wave, the formative pre-war writings of Hammett, Chandler, and Cain appeared at the same time, and sometimes later, than the pulp fictions of younger authors like Ross MacDonald and Mickey Spillane. This had several consequences. Since simultaneity of exposure emphasised similarities more than distinctions, hard-boiled fiction appeared to Japanese readers as a more compressed and consistent movement or genre. Also, because of this wide diversity of writers appearing on the scene,<sup>16</sup> the term ‘hard-boiled’ took on a much wider meaning than that which was focused on the private detective; it denoted a recognizably American and contemporary literary mode and a much wider collection of narrative *topoi* concerning urban crime and violence.

The effect on Japanese crime and detection literature was tremendous. Younger writers in the mid-1950s such as Ōyabu Haruhiko and Kōjō Kō met with instant commercial success when they adopted hard-boiled American prose (and its violent criminal brutality) to a Japanese idiom in novels like Ōyabu’s *Yajū shisu beshi/The Beast Must Die* (1958).<sup>17</sup> It was inevitable that Japanese studios would cash in on this trend. It was arguably Kurosawa Akira who produced the first examples of ‘hard-boiled’ films in Japan, *Yoidore tenshi/Drunken Angel* (Tōhō 1948) and *Nora inu/Stray Dog* (1949).<sup>18</sup> The great backlog of 1940s American crime films released

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inspire a similar ‘hard-boiled’ development of the detective story in Japan. The post-war reception of American hard-boiled literature in Japan was therefore all the more revelatory and consequential.

<sup>16</sup> This included the British writers James Hadley Chase and Graham Greene, who did not focus on private eyes.

<sup>17</sup> Japan’s most popular mystery writer, Matsumoto Seichi, wrote in a more Japanese idiom and resembled the work of Georges Simenon far more than that of American hard-boiled writers. The crime films of Nomura Yoshitarō at Shochiku were almost exclusively Matsumoto adaptations (as was Suzuki’s *Kagenaki koe/Voice Without a Shadow*, 1959), which further confuses the task of classifying the crime films of the 1950s.

<sup>18</sup> Other influences on Kurosawa’s two crime films included Georges Simenon, German thrillers like *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931) and the new urban realism of Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta/Rome Open City* (1945). Kurosawa later displayed an interest in American hard-boiled fiction when he adapted Ed McBain’s *Kings Ransom* as *Tengoku to*

throughout Japan's post-war period, the very films which French critics had called *films noir Americain*,<sup>19</sup> had established a market for a recognizable Japanese equivalent. With the rise of the double feature in Japan (which made Suzuki's career as a B-movie *auteur* possible), black and white crime films in limited urban settings could be produced more cheaply than *chanbara* spectacle, and thus fulfil production demands amounting to at least one new film per week.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the early fifties, directors like Noguchi Hiroshi at Nikkatsu and Suzuki's contemporaries Okamoto Kihachi and Sukawa Eizō at Tōhō produced black-and-white crime films that showed this hybrid influence of American hard-boiled literature and *film noir* as well as indigenous Japanese thriller writers such as Matsumoto Seichō and the Japanese hard-boiled literature discussed above. This transnational hybridity is not a theoretical construct, but overt in the films themselves: Suzuki's *Rajo to kenjū* begins with a cabaret act in which the *femme fatale*, a dancer, wears an American cowboy hat and boots while shooting six guns from a holster.



3:1 *Hādo-boirudo* as Transnational Hybridity: Shiraki Mari as a cabaret dancer fetishistically dressed as a cowboy

*jigoku/High and Low* (Tōhō, 1963).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, released in Japan in 1951; Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944, released in 1953), Preminger's *Laura* (1944, released in Japan in 1947): Hirano Kyoko, 'Japanese Crime Films in the 1940s and 1950s' in Cueto, ed., *Japon en noir*, p. 291. These films were all key texts of Borde and Chaumeton's seminal 1955 work *Panorama du films noir Americain/A Panorama of American Film Noir* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Schilling, *No Borders, No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*, p. 11.

Most of the iconography of the American *films noir* of the 1940s and 50s are consciously represented in these Japanese ‘translations’: extensive low-key lighting, expressive uses of shadows, tawdry night club acts with alluring singers, guns, fedoras, trench coats, brutal psychotics, torture, and professional criminals in hidden, tangled networks.

It is not surprising that this post-war trend took root particularly at Nikkatsu, which produced the majority of these hard-boiled thrillers. The studio had acted as a successful importer of American crime films, among others, for nearly ten years before venturing into film production in 1954. Noguchi Hiroshi’s *Ore no kenjū wa subayai/My Pistol is Quick* (1954), transposed from Mickey Spillane’s 1947 novel of that name, was Nikkatsu’s earliest thriller and its success started a trend, as over the next two years crime thrillers began to replace low budget *jidai-geki* as the studio’s characteristic product. *Chitei no uta/Song of the Underworld* (1956) was one of Noguchi’s more popular films, and Suzuki joined the trend with his third effort, *Akuma no machi/Demon Town* (1956). At its height of popularity, this cycle included even vehicles for Ishihara Yūjirō such as Masuda Toshio’s *Sabita naifu/Rusty Knife* (1958).

It is Noguchi’s iteration of the formula that most concerns us here. While Suzuki’s hard-boiled films were no doubt influenced by his own reading and viewing of the American hard-boiled mode,<sup>21</sup> a number of local and culturally specific features of the Suzuki style can be traced to his mentor. Noguchi was a reliable studio filmmaker who rarely departed from the stylistic norms of classical filmmaking. As a crime film innovator, nevertheless, Noguchi effortlessly adapted the seedy milieu of American urban thrillers to Tokyo in the midst of its long post-war reconstruction that

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<sup>21</sup> Suzuki mentions his reading of Dashiell Hammett in Isoda and Todoroki, ed.s, *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Wazai shuppan, 2005), p. 168; he refers to his knowledge of John Huston in Chris Desjardins, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Cinema* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005), p. 145.

sometimes served the needs of industry over population. Thus, Noguchi depicts, in muted tones, a post-industrial cityscape of empty, perhaps alienated modern structures. Correspondingly, he used spare yet modern interiors that made the milieu, rather than the film, look cheap.



3:2 Noguchi Hiroshi's Muted Cityscapes (*Kenjū buraichō: Nukiuchi no Ryūji/Ryūji the Gunslinger*, 1960)

In some ways a comic filmmaker, Noguchi takes a tongue-in-cheek notice of 1950s consumerism, and would often cut away from a scene slightly prematurely, though not disruptively so, in order to make a character or situation look absurd.



3:3 Noguchi's Bourgeois Aspirants: bored *yakuza* attend a (rather conservative) fashion show (*Kenjū buraichō: Nukiuchi no Ryūji*)

For the most part, however, his style is as muted as the low-key cabaret acts in his underworld nightclubs. This is a legitimate aesthetic choice, a hard-boiled universe in fact, and Noguchi deserves to be better known for it. But Suzuki, who used cabaret scenes for gaudy and outrageous spectacle, took the opposite course, pushing the boundaries of taste and credulity.

This is evident in Suzuki's baroque fourth film, *Rajo to kenjū* (1957), which anticipates Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) as the story of an innocent man manipulated by two women (played by the same actress, Mari Shiraki) who may or may not be the same. It is also a stylistic manifesto which makes a significant use of jump cuts two years before Jean-Luc Godard was credited with revolutionizing the cinema for doing the same, in *À Bout de souffle/Breathless* (1960). Suzuki's film is an unpredictable mix of erotic exploitation and tired *policier* conventions (as contemporary reviewers were quick to point out),<sup>22</sup> but also dynamic stylistic deformations that anticipate the revision of hard-boiled material in films of the *nouvelle vague* such as *Tirez sur la Pianiste* (1962). The opening sequence, an early tour-de-force of confusion, artifice, and eroticism, falls close to the latter. It begins with the meta-textual 'cowboy cabaret' number mentioned above. As the strip artist fires off her imitation six-guns, a glass breaks on a table, suggesting that a real shot has been fired. In the ensuing montage of countenances, confused movement, and running feet, Suzuki refuses to establish who shot who, but an innocent photographer (Mizushima Michitarō, Nikkatsu's answer to Bogart) soon finds himself on the street, being lured into the dancer's apartment. As the girl strips to her underwear, Mizushima whips out his camera and starts to photograph her. Soon, the girl is 'play-modelling' for Mizushima, posing erotically up against the brick wall of her apartment. A medium shot captures Shiraki, gazing

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<sup>22</sup> Unattributed review of *Rajo to kenjū*, *Asahi shinbun* (Dec. 9, 1957); in reference to the film's blatant eroticism, Tsuda Yukio in *Kinema junpō* no. 195 (Late Jan. 1958) fumed that the film's 'transparent commercialism is disgusting': p. 70.

erotically into the camera, which is angled sharply to the left.



3:4 Film as Fashion Shoot: Shot (1): Shiraki Mari 'models' for a photographer, but the only camera shooting her is Suzuki's

Suddenly, a jump cut frames Shiraki in close-up, from a frontal angle, as she is creating a different pose, whipping her head and long hair from the bottom to the top of the frame.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The choreography of this second shot resembles the visual introduction of Gilda (Rita Hayworth) in Charles Vidor's 1946 film of that name for Columbia Pictures.





3:5 Film as Fashion Shoot, Shot (2): an innovative jump cut to Shiraki in a different pose

This jump cut departs from the diegesis of this narrative film, momentarily, to become a photomontage, a moving magazine. In doing so, it artfully depicts a commercialized eroticism and subjectivity (the model who lives for the camera). Suzuki throws a further cog into the diegesis, for while this ‘photomontage’ occurs the protagonist is *not*, so far as the viewer can tell, using his camera, but gazing directly at Shiraki. The jump cut renders the diegetic status of image as indeterminate; it appears as a pure imposition of directorial style.

The jump cut appears only twice in the film, however, and the style of *Rajo to kenjū* from this point on is remarkably confident and largely conventional. Apart from a certain tendency to avoid shot-reverse shot patterns,<sup>24</sup> the framing, editing, stock music, and even the location views of the stereotypically ‘bustling’ city are perfectly typical of the genre. There are exceptions: on one occasion the *femme fatale* looks

<sup>24</sup> Suzuki later claimed, ‘I never use shot-reverse shot’ in cases of two-person dialogue scenes: ‘Forgetting Foreign Names,’ (interview with Ueno Kōshi) translated in Suzuki and Hasumi, *The Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms*, p. 73.

into the black slate cover of her posh record player, and sees there a superimposed view of the protagonist as he drives his car. This view of the character has not occurred in the narrative prior: it is not a flashback, but a vision.<sup>25</sup> Although these flamboyant touches, upon consideration, seem to challenge a simplistic understanding of narrative time in the cinema, at this stage of Suzuki's career they are infrequent and not at all disruptive of the hegemony of classical film form.

On the narrative level, a number of clichés are executed with seeming earnestness. Instead of focusing on the anxieties of a man who has been framed for murder, the film represents the police force as bending over backwards to help the protagonist prove his innocence. This white-washed celebration of the Tokyo Metropolitan police is typical of the films of the 1950s and utterly reactionary for a director who would later condemn all authority. Other generic elements, however, are fresh and surprising: in a fight scene between the gangsters and the hero, the latter improbably passes off the flash pan of his camera as a gun. This is another emphasis, like the 'cowboy cabaret', on the artificiality and 'make-believe' that characterizes the whole of this most fanciful scenario. Other such touches include a villain (Sugai Ichirō) humorously made to resemble V.I. Lenin, a fight scene executed as pure farce, with both sides scurrying around without the slightest agility or courage, and a hero deftly portrayed by Mizushima as the ultimate everyman, devoid of any special heroic or romantic qualities, at least until the disappointingly conventional finale.

Despite a formidable performance from the young Shiraki Mari, the characterization of the *femme fatale* (or non-characterization, as her identity remains unfixed) tends towards Hollywood convention by which, as Janey Place writes, 'we observe both the social [agency] of myth which damns the sexual woman and all who

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<sup>25</sup> Kurahara Koreyoshi also created a diegetically 'problematic' flashback in his *Ore wa matteiru ze* of the same year, albeit in a more conventional narrative context of a hero imagining the circumstances of his brother's death.

become enmeshed by her, and a particularly potent stylistic presentation of the sexual strength of woman which man fears.<sup>26</sup> Constantly undressed, Shiraki is a pure male projection of seduction and availability. Correspondingly, the film comes across at times as an extended advert for a new style of ladies' underwear and bra, a notion to which Suzuki responded, with characteristic irony, in *Ankokugai no bijo*, by featuring young *men* in this underwear at a frivolous dance party. In the typical fashion of both Japanese melodrama and American *film noir*, the *femme fatale* must die, though not before bombing her villainous ex-lover.

Given her seductive wiles and the exploitative nature of the picture, it is remarkable that the protagonist passes up every chance of making love to Shiraki. Here is the film's satirical sting: given a script that reproduces the sexual politics of American (and Japanese) hard-boiled thrillers, the director places a baroque over-emphasis on voyeurism. On two occasions, the hero gazes at the silhouette of Shiraki as she strips behind an opaque window (a window, moreover, that opens onto a public landing).



3:6 That Obscure Object of Desire: the *femme fatale* as cinematic shadow

<sup>26</sup> Place, 'Women in Film Noir' in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, rev. ed. (London: BFI, 1980), p. 48.

Later, on the justification of ‘collecting evidence’ for the police, the hero sets his camera on an adjacent rooftop and takes pictures of the heroine as she showers nude. As in Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), voyeurism has replaced the desire for sexual contact. Perhaps Suzuki intends to represent a post-war crisis of masculinity, or perhaps the voyeurism of the middle-aged hero, in full cooperation with the police, signifies a pre-war patriarchal order in its surveillance and control of femininity. Further, the scene features a number of extreme close-ups on Mizushima’s camera that emphasise what normative Hollywood cinema, through techniques such as eye-line matching, aims to conceal: that the notorious male gaze of the cinema, the gaze of mastery, is conditional upon its mediation. Mizushima’s camera stands in for the film camera and makes a reflexive point to which Suzuki will obsessively return: the gaze should not function in the vacuum of a diegesis. That is to say, the director rejects what would be considered a normative use of the male gaze in the narrative cinema. An example of normative usage might be a male and female character gazing at one another, their respective POVs captured by over-the-shoulder reverse shots which allow the actors to avoid looking directly into the camera (a potential disruption). Suzuki objects to this attempt to conceal the mediation of the camera, and resorts to often non-diegetic means to reinstate it. The audience must be made aware of mediation, which creates the male gaze just as surely as its object—like the silhouette of the nude *femme fatale* in the window—is a fantasy on a screen, a cinematic shadow.

A year later, *Ankokugai no bijo* demonstrates a director in full command of classical studio narrative yet determined to manifest a differential signature. The largely conventional visual schema of *Rajo to kenjū* is replaced by the spectacular use

of what Hasumi has called the ‘previously neglected [visual] details’ of genre.<sup>27</sup> In one instance, a gunfight is portrayed by means of an empty, darkened, opulent stairway, punctuated by enchanting bursts of gunpowder. In another, the audience views a mannequin made up to look like the heroine and containing a diamond in its breast. But now it is twisted, with clumps of the breast torn off, and half-sunk in the slime of a dank and abject sewer where the protagonist has dumped it. The shot is magnificently eerie and full of foreboding, expressive of desires so abject they can only be expressed by simulacra.



3:7 *Hādo-boirudo* Cinema as Abject Simulacrum: the terrifying inexpressible, by proxy

For Hasumi, this hypostatization of the generic and the conventional *is* the authorial signature of Suzuki. But already in *Ankokugai no bijo*, as Eric Crosby has shown, we see evidence of a bifurcation between authorial aims and the dominant stylistic norms of the studio cinema. Grappling creatively with the problems of Cinemascope composition in one of the first ‘Nikkatsu-scope’ films, Suzuki manages to introduce a highly differential style of framing.

<sup>27</sup> Hasumi, ‘A World Without Seasons,’ in Suzuki and Hasumi, *The Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms*, p. 14.

After demonstrating that Japanese studios necessarily adapted their widescreen compositional strategies from Hollywood, who created and exported the technology, Crosby analyses the director's penchant for 'unbalanced' compositions utilizing extreme edge-framing, extreme foreground and multi-planar staging, and the 'obtrusive' use of tracking shots to introduce new characters and information.<sup>28</sup>

Crosby recognizes these as departures from demonstrable stylistic norms:

Surely, Suzuki could have avoided such compositional awkwardness, but the crucial point here is that he understands the convention, employs it, and revises it to suit his own stylistic predilections. Frequently though, he takes this one step further by creating an expectation for compositional payoff, but then ultimately subverts it.<sup>29</sup>

Although Crosby argues that his 'flamboyant devices serve a function related to the articulation of narrative information and character psychology,' he seems to recognize that Suzuki's line between articulation and disruption is a fine one indeed: 'In other instances, such compositional imbalances will seem to have no function other than the purely decorative, as we see throughout *Underworld Beauty*....In these moments...we hope for some visual surprise or significant narrative information but we are thwarted as often as we are satisfied.'<sup>30</sup> Crosby's conclusion provides an ideal description of the director's early aesthetics: 'Suzuki's early widescreen cinema seems to abide selectively by American norms while *also highlighting the arbitrariness of their functions*.'<sup>31</sup> In other words, alongside an increasing mastery of accepted convention, Suzuki has developed a self-reflexive critique of the same. His differential compositions suggest alternative cinematic possibilities but also carry a negative critical force in pointing to the 'arbitrary' studio reliance on one set of norms over another. This is not only in relation to framing: *Ankokugai no bijo* includes a

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<sup>28</sup> Crosby, 'Widescreen composition and transnational influence: Early Anamorphic Filmmaking in Japan' in Steve Neale and Sheldon Hall, eds., *Widescreen Worldwide* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), pp. 183-4.

<sup>29</sup> Crosby, p. 184.

<sup>30</sup> Crosby, pp. 184-5.

<sup>31</sup> Crosby, p. 185. Italics mine.

deformation of narrative time involving a montage of gazes of gangsters reacting to the arrival of a hero who does not in fact enter the door until a later shot.

The sexual politics of the film, rather than problematising male voyeurism as before, depict the hard-boiled urban milieu as a surrealist fantasia of polymorphic perversity. The figure of the store mannequin becomes the iconic, narrative, and ideological centre of the film.<sup>32</sup> The plot involves a hero (Mizushima) who contends not only with the cold, repressed sadism of the *yakuza*, but also the heroine's boyfriend, a perverted sculptor of mannequins who is obsessed with human anatomy. Only this sculptor can retrieve stolen diamonds by dissecting the stomach of a corpse of a man who swallowed them, and he does so—accompanied by the eerie sound of twinkling bells on the soundtrack—with an expression resembling surprised ecstasy. In this hard-boiled myth of Pygmalion, both the hero and the perverse sculptor want to 'mould' the rebellious heroine (a defiant performance by Shiraki that escapes all forms of containment), but while the sculptor is an isolated predator resembling Peter Lorre in *M*, the patriarchal hero carries the full weight of institutionalized masculine prerogative. Small wonder that the film ends with a shot of a birdcage, suggesting the heroine's entrapment in stifling domesticity with the hero.

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<sup>32</sup> The surrealist films of Buñuel and Dali make heavy use of simulacra of the human body such as mannequins. Suzuki's close-up on a putrefied cat may be an homage to the rotting ass of *Un Chien Andalou*; similar references to that film appear in *Nikutai no mon/Gate of Flesh* (1964) and *Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill* (1967).



3:8 Closing in on the Birdcage: the film ends with spunky teenager in domestic partnership with the bullying elder she had previously repulsed

Along the way, the viewer sees nude mannequins displayed at every stage of their production, from eerie shelves of detached heads with lewd expressions to fully formed figures with, of all things, artificial pubic hair. At one point the workers on the factory floor begin to fondle their mannequins sexually.



3:9 On the Edge of Taste and Censorship: Polymorphic Perversity in *Ankokugai no bijo*: note the shadows that barely conceal the artificial pubic hair, a bodily feature that for years was an obsession of the Japanese film censors



The figure of the store mannequin is a double allegory, not only for male fetish, but for the post-war consumerism that renders everything as fetish. With Nikkatsu B-pictures at this time flirting along the edge of exploitation (with partial female nudity, for instance),<sup>33</sup> Suzuki takes the plastic fetishism of the crime thriller to an outrageous, and yet cleverly uncensorable, degree, producing a sophisticated reflection on the genre.

## II. SUZUKI'S DOG: COLOUR AND COMEDY

From 1960-1962, arguably the heyday of the '*Nikkatsu akushon*' mega-genre, Suzuki's career was dominated, against his will, by a series of star vehicles for Wada Kōji, the youngest member of Nikkatsu's much-touted 'Diamond Line' of action stars.<sup>34</sup> This association was a blessing and a curse: while Suzuki gained some commercial success and security as a contract director, his 1950s narratives of disorientation and unconventional subjectivity were made impossible by the fixed, innocuous persona of Wada, a teen-aged studio creation. Some of Suzuki's efforts, despite incidental pleasures of humour and setting, are so conventional as to be dated, but others served as an experimental ground for the advancement of the language of popular film.

*Kutabare gurentai*, Suzuki's first film with Wada and his first in colour, was highly unusual in suffusing a blatantly commercial teen pop-song vehicle with an avant-garde spirit. Here, along with extremely differential framing (including deliberate distortions of the anamorphic lens), Suzuki created the non-diegetic colour

<sup>33</sup> Publicity stills exist, possibly unused, for Suzuki's *Raburetaa* (1959) featuring the heroine baring her breasts during a love scene (see Suzuki and Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: the desert under the cherry blossoms*, p. 42). However no such nudity or love scene exists in the theatrical release of this (suspiciously short) B-picture: it may have been removed.

<sup>34</sup> From 1960, Nikkatsu capitalized on Ishihara Yūjirō's stardom by manufacturing a star-centered media image for the studio. Its centerpiece was what it called its 'Diamond Line' of four action stars, Ishihara, Kobayashi Akira, Akagi Keihachirō and Wada Kōji.

stylization that would characterize his authorial practice in films such as *Nikutai no mon* (1964) and *Tokyo nagaremono* (1966). The improbable story concerns a lower class teen whose adoptive father is killed by a greedy developer in a hit-and-run incident, but who suddenly inherits the leadership of the Matsudaira clan of Awaji Island. If *Kutabare gurentai* was, by studio design, a pop-culture confection, Suzuki's deployment of colour and movement creates a cinematic equivalent of the *matsuri*, or street festivals, that are woven into the picture.

The scenario appears to advance a suspect ideology, proposing a facile reconciliation of the major class and cultural divisions of the era: new American-style consumer aspirations, symbolized by rock'n'roll and leisure sports, and *Nihonjinron* discourses of Japanese uniqueness represented by the 'feudal' traditionalism of the Matsudaira clan. But Suzuki undercuts the out-of-touch gentry at every turn, whether by a retainer who loses his shoe while making his ceremonial approach to the dais, or by the street urchin hero, who dismantles the clan coat of arms while telling the matriarch to 'stop spouting *jidai-geki*,' thus emphasizing the constructed (or fabricated) nature of 'tradition'. Moreover the conflict between the Matsudaira clan and the development cartel from Tokyo seems to put the lie to the very synthesis proposed. The melodramatic element is also unconventional. Suzuki displaces teen romance (the credited female lead is all-but-invisible) with an 'Oedipal romance' in which the teen hero pursues his estranged mother (Higashi Emiko), demanding that she renounce her 'sordid' sexual life. This bizarre scenario is played out seemingly earnestly, but also seems to reflexively criticize the film itself and Nikkatsu's *kozō akushon* ('youngster action') cycle of films as symptoms of a cultural arrested development.

The film opens with a jolt of colour, style, and speed. The third shot following the

titles finds a car heading down a Tokyo street to the accompaniment of upbeat New Orleans jazz. The next shot is a close-up view, from inside the car, of a stuffed animal—a white dog—placed on top of the back seat.



3:10 Suzuki's Dog: Colour, Modernity, and Meaning, Shot (1a)

As the shot and the music continues, the colour of the white dog shifts to a gaudy purple, as if sprayed by an invisible hand.



3:11 Suzuki's Dog: Colour, Modernity, and Meaning, Shot (1b): the white dog gradually turns purple

The following two shots reveal the driver, a greedy businessman (Kondō Hiroshi), in a rapid match on action as he is kissing his mistress. The film then cuts back to the stuffed dog, which now shifts from purple to aqua blue, then falls forward as the car hits and kills the adoptive father of the hero.

Nothing in post-war Japanese cinema—not even the overtly theatrical stylization of kabuki-esque films like Kinoshita's *Narayama bushikō/Ballad of Narayama* (Shōchiku 1958)—prepares one for this flourish of non-diegetic colouration. It transforms a trivial object whose relation to the narrative is either totally arbitrary, or open to a thousand interpretations. It is pure imposition of authorial style, but to what purpose? It is a metaphor, but for what?

In order to better understand Suzuki's formalism here in the context of post-war cinematic evolution, we may refer to Deleuze's theory of 'colourism' as a cinematic style in its own right, and also as a tool in the creation of an important variety of post-war cinematic signs, the *any-space-whatever*. An *any-space-whatever*, a term borrowed from anthropologist Pascal Augé, is the product of the cinema's ability, by montage, framing, or even colour, to transform specific places and objects—locked as they are in an identifiable set of spatial and historical relations—into indeterminate spaces which express qualities and possibilities rather than fixity.<sup>35</sup> Consider, for example, a bridge too vast for its entirety to be seen, viewed in a cinematic montage which shows hundreds of pieces without regard for spatial orientation between shots. This filmic bridge loses all sense of coherence, particularity, and function, becoming instead a space which expresses 'pure qualities and powers,' such as strength, for

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<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1983), p. 109.

example.<sup>36</sup> It has become an *any-space-whatever*.

Deleuze situates this filmic tendency in the post-war urban history of many nations ‘with their towns demolished or being reconstructed, its waste grounds, its shanty towns...its undifferentiated urban tissue, its vast unused places...[and] warehouses.’<sup>37</sup> All of these locations feature heavily in Suzuki’s hard-boiled portraits of Tokyo. Moreover the identity crises of defeated post-war nations (especially Japan) gave a sort of allegorical importance to the creation of uncertain and indeterminate city space. When, in Suzuki’s *Aoi chibusa/Blue Breasts* (1958), an abandoned, bombed out shack is the site of a real or possibly imagined rape, it becomes an allegorical site of cultural anxiety.<sup>38</sup>

For Deleuze, this is an important tendency of the post-war cinema: to transform spatially and historically situated places into ‘spaces’, which cease to express concrete spatial and historical relations and instead become purely expressive and affective. Space (typically represented *via* medium/long shot) becomes an expresser of emotion (or any quality), much like a close-up of the human face. Deleuze particularly emphasises the potential of colour effects to ‘absorb’ and take over their objects and give them at once an indeterminate quality and an affective force. He uses an example from clinical psychology: ‘The young schizophrenic experiences his first feelings of unreality’ when he views ‘a field of corn which becomes boundless dazzling yellow immensity.’<sup>39</sup> In a similar way, a strain of post-war cinema emphasises the absorbent colour that transforms spaces or objects into expression. The essential formula of

<sup>36</sup> This example developed by Deleuze from a reflection by filmmaker Jorge Ivens in Deleuze, p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, p. 120.

<sup>38</sup> On the *topos* of the ‘wandering woman,’ i.e. the connection between the cinematic female subject, her preoccupied vision of indeterminate post-war spaces, and post-war national identity crises in Europe, see Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 93-95, 97-99, 119-121, 131-135, 140-141, 144-146, 155-157, 160-164.

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, p. 110.

colourism is expressed by Godard's pronouncement, 'it's not blood, it's red.'<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, when asked why the heroine's fingernails suddenly turn to a yellow colour in *Hishū monogatari*, Suzuki replied that it was because the room was yellow.<sup>41</sup> As Deleuze explains, 'in opposition to a simply coloured image, the *colour-image* does not refer to a particular object, but absorbs all that it can: it is the power which seizes all....Colour is...the affect itself, that is, the virtual conjunction of all the objects it picks up.'<sup>42</sup> It is the colour that makes meaning.

Godard's quote above allows us to appreciate the conceptual achievement of Suzuki in anticipating the use of non-diegetic colour in the *nouvelle vague* (Godard's *Une Femme est une Femme*, 1961). Suzuki's dog is an object so trivial it barely registers as more than a place-holder for colour change. It is almost as if his indeterminate colouration of the dog is allegorically expressing the creation of the *any-space-whatever*, which for Deleuze corresponds to the post-war social condition: they 'rise up where the modern affects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed, and interminable waiting were developing.'<sup>43</sup> For Suzuki, in the vanguard of this representational shift, wild colour detachment combines with the automobile as symptoms of an anxious age, characterized by speed and visual excitement but heading (like the hit-and-run driver) in a risky direction.

Deleuze's examples of stylistic colourism from Godard and Antonioni refer to diegetic colour effects, i.e. the red of blood, the red of the desert. But Suzuki goes one better by asking viewers to make meaning of the 'virtual conjunction' of a series of non-diegetic colours and the object (the dog) to which they are 'falsely' or 'arbitrarily' attached. His usage corresponds better to what Deleuze calls '*movement colour* which

<sup>40</sup> in Deleuze, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup> 'Forgetting Foreign Names' in Suzuki and Hasumi, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze, p. 121.

passes from one tone to another,' rather like a change in stage lighting. Deleuze speculates that its origin lies in the musical comedy, especially that of Vincente Minnelli, 'and its capacity for extracting an unlimited virtual world from a conventional state of things.'<sup>44</sup> Like Minnelli, the play of colour absorbs both audience and characters in a choreographed dance, like a puppet on strings. But who is pulling the strings? In Suzuki's film it appears to be big business: the tycoon in the car who will kill the hero's adoptive father while kissing his actual mother. And yet the tycoons are just as caught up in the dance as the victims, this entropic dance of desire that leads, inevitably, to death.

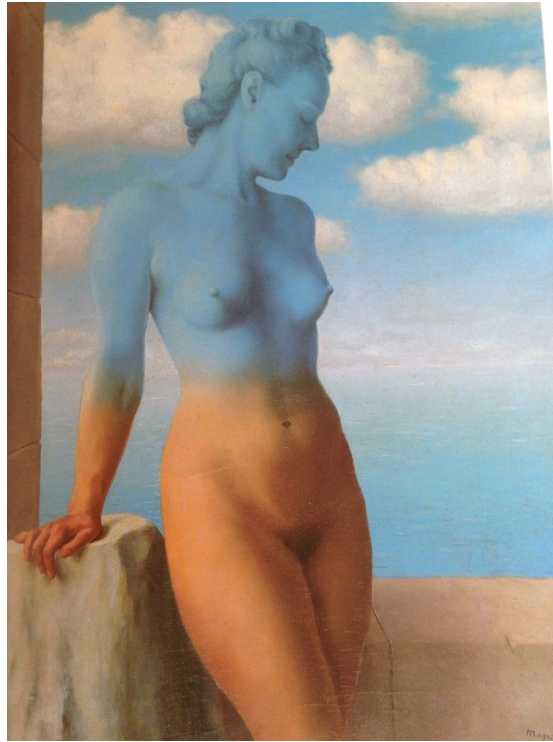
But unlike the musical comedy, which prepares its audience for non-diegetic colour styles with the theatrical set piece of the musical number, Suzuki literally imposes his colourism onto an unfolding narrative context which cannot contain it: the effect, in all its specular fascination and interpretative openness, can *only* be disruptive and provocative. It violates every dictate of the predictable spatial relations and closed narrative realism of classical studio norms. It violates the balanced, earthy colour scheme of classical Japanese painting,<sup>45</sup> instead recalling European and Taishō modernism, particularly surrealism; it soon landed Suzuki in trouble with Nikkatsu.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> David Desser, 'Gate of Flesh(tones): Colour in the Japanese Cinema,' pp. 316-7; cf. Stephen Peacock's convincing assertion of the highly controlled and systematic use of brightly coloured object in Ozu's *Equinox Flower* (1958): Peacock, *Colour* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 30-33. It is also worth noting that, outside of portraiture, colour usage in pre-modern Japanese painting (for instance *emaki* scrolls and *yamato-e* painting) was closely tied to the regular and ordered symbol systems of the four seasons and other natural imagery: cf. Satō Tadao, 'Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts,' pp. 165, 171-5. A recent discussion of Hiroshige's late *ukiyo-e* at the British Museums affirms the tension between 'stand-out' colours and deliberately 'flat' colouration in the late work, but in the end emphasises the authorial achievement of a sense of harmony: Utagawa Hiroshige, *the Moon Reflected* (London: IKON/British Museum, 2008), pp. 22-23, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Nikkatsu president Hori reprimanded Suzuki for 'extensive use of symbolism within a traditional action picture' in the final Wada vehicle, *Ore ni kaketa yatsura/Those Who Bet on Me*: translated in Thomas Weisser, 'The Films of Suzuki Seijun,' *Asian Cult Cinema* 21 (1998), p. 51.



3:12 'Moving Colour': Magritte's portrait of the nude bisected by colour contrast: *Black Magic*, 1945

Moreover, in this 'false' conjunction between colour and object we witness an early birth of the consequential non-diegetic stylization of the cinema of the 1960s. Part of Suzuki's invention involves the creation of what Deleuze calls the *opsign* or 'pure optical sign,' the first and earliest variety of cinematic signs which belong *not* to the classical cinema, but to the cinema after it, the modernist or neo-modernist cinema of the 'time-image' whose nature I consider in Chapter Eight. The break-up of the dominant 'action-image' of the studios, with its characters who perceive and act upon narrative circumstances and given visual information, gave rise to characters 'in a state of strolling...or rambling which defines *pure optical or sound situations*.' The characters no longer know what to do, how to grasp their problem. Therefore, the objects that such characters see no longer change or motivate them, as in the visual economy of classical narrative; they simply exist, often as *any-space-whatever* (i.e. a



reflection of mental states).<sup>47</sup> Instead of sights motivated by (and in turn motivating) narrative development, they become sights in-themselves, what Deleuze calls ‘pure optical signs.’ While the conventional dramaturgy of *Kutabare gurentai* does not permit such indecisive characters, Suzuki uses colour as a modernist ‘shorthand’ to create non-diegetic observers of the spectacle—an intimate, essentially non-fictional moment between viewer and screen. His colour-changing ‘incidental objects’ are suitably ignored by the stock characters, but for the *audience*, they exist outside of narrative causality, as open metaphors perhaps, but above all as pure *opsigns*, suited to our particular historical condition, yet simply there to be looked at. Suzuki's abstract colourism seems to do for all colours what Kandinsky attributed to whiteness: ‘White...is a symbol of the world from which all as a definite attribute has disappeared. White...works upon us negatively, like...pauses in music that break temporarily the melody....Not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities.’<sup>48</sup> Suzuki's dog is similarly an example of loud, brash ‘silence’ signifying nothing, and everything.

## CONCLUSION: FROM REALISM TO REFLEXIVITY

The colour stylization of Suzuki's B-pictures, beginning with *Kutabare gurentai*, was arguably more conceptually radical and philosophically consequential than the early stylistics of the Shōchiku *nuberu bagu*, which included such techniques by Ōshima as the limited use of non-diegetic sound (in *Seishun zankoku monogatari/Cruel Story of Youth*, 1960), complex flashback structures, and a rhetoric of political figuration (people or emblems set against a non-diegetic black background

<sup>47</sup> A contemporary example occurs in Louis Malle's *L'Ascenseur de l'échafaud* (1957), an important precursor of the *nouvelle vague*, in which Jeanne Moreau wanders aimlessly through the streets of Paris. Cf. Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle*, pp. 93-95, 144-146, 155-157, 160-164.

<sup>48</sup> Kandinsky, ‘Concerning the Spiritual in Art,’ quoted in Peacock, *Colour*, p. 16.

in *Nihon no yoru to kiri/Night and Fog in Japan*) which actually had a number of cinematic antecedents.<sup>49</sup>

Like the *nuberu bagu*, moreover, though not so inclined towards the topical, the Suzuki signature is political and ideological as much as it is aesthetic, as we have seen with the sexual politics of his hard-boiled films. Only a fully developed connection between stylistic impertinence and ideological reversal—the negation of dominant practices—had yet to emerge. This search for a politics of the image, a synthesis between spectacle and ideological critique, may help to explain how Suzuki embraced the realist ‘social problem’ film of the early 1960s, only to quickly abandon it.

His *Subete ga kurutteru* is an urban teen delinquency film, a cycle that had begun with Nikkatsu’s own *taiyōzoku* teen melodramas. But by 1960-61 it had embraced the more political films of Ōshima (*Seishun zankoku monogatari*) and Hani (*Furyō shōnen/Bad Boys*, 1961). Suzuki’s film, which is also influenced by the *nouvelle vague* (over two-thirds of the film is exterior location shooting in areas like Shinjuku), has an equal claim to membership in the early phase of the *nuberu bagu* as two more famous Nikkatsu films, Imamura’s *Buta to gunkan* (1961) and Kurahara’s *Kyonetsu no kisetsu/Season of Heat* (which debuted only a week before the Suzuki film). Only Suzuki’s ‘low’ status as a ‘cult’ or ‘yakuza’ director has prevented this manifest association.

Moreover I would argue Suzuki advances, politically, a step further beyond the early *nuberu bagu* as well as Kurahara’s rather exploitative film. Rather than proposing the positive or negative political significance of masculine, teen-aged crime and sexual violence,<sup>50</sup> the basis of the *taiyōzoku* films that had made Nikkatsu

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<sup>49</sup> John Ford’s *Drums Along the Mohawk* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1939) climaxes with an abstract iconography of American democracy, that is, people of various classes set against non-diegetic backdrops of the colours of the American flag.

<sup>50</sup> Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro’s article on Ōshima’s ‘break-out’ film *Seishun zankoku monogatari* stresses the limits of

wealthy, Suzuki represents an arrested and pathologically anxious post-war masculinity, marked, in particular, by a profound fear of female sexuality. He then proceeds to relate this fear of the feminine to the pre-war culture of a patriarchal order that, as Suzuki openly declares in this film, was responsible for the war, and now looks on in horror at the generation it has created.

The title *Everything Goes Wrong* applies not only to the characters, but to post-war Japan: every aspect is misdirected, out-of-kilter. It is Suzuki's most direct and vitriolic indictment of post-war society (his *Burial of the Sun*, so to speak) as a blighted urban holocaust of emotional despair, sexual predation, and enslavement to the dollar. Where his later films are allegorical and open-ended, tending towards the critique of social structures rather than the epiphenomena of ordinary lives, here Suzuki addresses his concerns through dialogue and a contrived plot set against the backdrop of the great student protests of 1960 against the ANPO treaty.<sup>51</sup> It concerns a high school student Jirō (Kawachi Tamio) who cannot get over the fact that his mother is the long-time mistress of a prominent businessman, the arms manufacturer Nanbara (Ashida Shinsuke). The mild, all-too-human Nanbara metonymically serves as a figure of responsibility for the war (Jirō's father was run over in a 'friendly fire

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its political discursiveness—some of which limits are shared by Suzuki's film—but also stresses the way in which Ōshima attempts to turn the violence and nihilism of its teenage delinquents, particularly the rapine male protagonist, into a political statement, if not a political weapon or 'act of defiance,' by making their behavior so extreme that it is unassimilable into the status quo and not explicable by resort to 'victim consciousness,' i.e. the popular notion that the actions and fates of individual Japanese are determined by historical circumstance. Compared to Suzuki's film, then, the gendered violence and criminal behavior of the masculine hero is therefore more of a positive construct, or at least a 'political potentiality': Yoshimoto, 'Questions of the New: Ōshima Nagisa *Cruel Story of Youth*' in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer, eds., *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 168-180. In the films of Imamura and the early Kurahara (as Dennis Washburn argues in the case of the former), gendered violence is a quasi-sacred assertion of 'freedom' from the social order: Washburn, 'The Arrest of Time: The Mythic Transgressions of *Vengeance is Mine*' in Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh, eds., *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 319, 321, 324-26, 336-339.

<sup>51</sup> In 1960, the proposed revision and renewal of the U.S. Japan Security Treaty of 1952, a major determinant of Japan's political and economic positioning within the Cold War system, was opposed by massive citizen opposition and protest carried out by a broad coalition of social groups, for example students, women, and intellectuals. There were also many attempts by Leftist students to radicalize the broadly democratic, pro-constitutional nature of the coalition. In May 1960 the revision of the treaty passed the Diet, but the outcome of this and many other mass protest movements of the time was the fall of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke's administration. See Koschmann, 'Intellectuals and Politics' in Andrew Gordon, ed. *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 406-409. cf. John Dower, 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems,' in Gordon, pp. 20-22.

incident' by the tanks that Nanbara manufactured) and as an agent of post-war reconstruction (of which the Cold War arms trade was a principal part).

Jirō's problem with his mother, through no fault of his own, has led to a pathological correlation between female sexuality and money. There is a frightening innocence to the moment when he throws coins at the free-spirited girl (Nezu Yoshiko) who has ended his virginity; he really does assume that women have sex for money. His condition is no one's fault, but it drives Jirō mad, like Orestes, until he destroys himself and all around him. When he confronts Nanbara at the climax, Jirō veers between acute perception of the failings of the war generation and an animalistic rage in which he murders his only father-figure.

It seems as if Jirō cannot escape the war he never saw—the desperate entanglements that survival necessitated. But this is an incomplete reading. For each of the characters, it is not the war, but the 'money-or-nothing' pattern of living under capitalism that bedevils their every step. Jirō's desperate search for money (through increasingly criminal behaviour) is ironically accompanied by an idealist's disgust for the monetary tainting of all relationships. The idealism only feeds his abominable treatment of his girlfriend Tani, herself a troubled victim/participant of a gang which pays for its thrills by prostituting female members.

Tani's friend Etsuko (Nakagawa Shinako) is trying to raise money for an abortion. Etsuko is treated with casual misogyny by her boyfriend, an otherwise estimable leader of a protest group who illustrates the limitations of the student movement. The desperate Etsuko waylays Nanbara into sleeping with her for money. We should and have been sympathetic to Etsuko's plight, but as she veers wildly between seduction, extortion, and beggary, Nanbara can only look upon her pityingly. A close-up of Etsuko shows not simply desperation, but total vacancy—a vacuum devoid of values,

dreams, or sense of self. Not even personal desire lives there, only the needs of the moment.



3:13 Post-war Vacancies: *Subete ga kurutteru* (1960) and the emptiness of youth

One can imagine such faces were common in the starving post-war Tokyo of 1945. But for Suzuki, the new prosperity and the much-vaunted doubling of average incomes had made little difference for these children of the urban working class. Why not? Their desperation is economic, but also cultural. The final scene follows a hack journalist and a hostess who is mystified by the misfortunes of these teenagers. The camera then tracks with seeming aimlessness around the hostess' bar, revealing an almost endless supply of American-style consumer paraphernalia. Has the institutionalised commercialism of desire, in partnership with a sensationalist popular media, created the teen degeneracy that it profitably feeds on?

In the main, Suzuki offers no answers—it is a characteristically negative analysis. Everyone is responsible and yet no one is to blame. But clearly nostalgia, or return to the world of Nanbara, is no answer. Jirō's mother admits that she has become calculating, valuing her lover's money rather than their relationship. In response,

Nanbara answers enigmatically: ‘I’m sorry we couldn’t be as free as young people today.’ Energy and the possibility of self-determination still belong to the young, and Suzuki envies this, despite the inferno of their cultural situation.

It would have been fascinating to see the development of this craftsman of social melodrama. Never one to repeat himself, however, Suzuki forged in the new direction that would make his name. Hasumi Shigehiko considered Suzuki’s teen melodramas such as *Akutarō* (1963), which we have not had space to treat here, as the perfection of Shōchiku Ōfuna melodrama which Suzuki had encountered as an Assistant Director.<sup>52</sup> But Hasumi ignores the equal importance of the *hādo-boirudo* genre to Suzuki’s development. I argue, as do many critics, that in the 1960s Suzuki came to concentrate on the action genre, spectacle, and reflexivity, none of which, by the most inclusive measure, were hallmarks of 1950s Shōchiku melodrama. I argue, further, that Suzuki developed a self-justifying modernist cinema practice that declared itself antithetical to realism. The problem with realism, at least the version of it that Suzuki observed from his rivals Kurahara and Imamura, was possibly that it relegated politics and philosophy to the realm of dialogue and diegesis, rather than to the role of the camera (which had established itself as openly discursive in Godard). It also tended (certainly in Kurahara) to naturalize exploitation through the sway of narrative and identification with the male protagonist. Suzuki was either unable or unwilling to achieve the kind of pared-down realism that could become differential and philosophically expressive, and his silent film influences, moreover—expressionism, French surrealism, and Carl Theodor Dreyer<sup>53</sup>—inclined him in the opposite direction. Unlike the path-breaking films discussed above, Suzuki’s stylistic audacity (through jump cuts) in *Subete ga kurutteru* is not as provocative as Godard’s. Suzuki was of no

<sup>52</sup> Hasumi, ‘A World Without Seasons,’ p. 16

<sup>53</sup> The final close-ups on the heroine of *Hishū monogatari/A Tale of Sorrow* (1977) are directly referential to those of Joan of Arc in Dreyer’s *Le Passion de Jeanne D’Arc* (1928).

temperament to take up the position of follower of either the *nouvelle vague* or the *nuberu bagu*. Partly for this reason, and partly out of necessity as a Nikkatsu director, he would explore his formal and political concerns through genre, in the allegory of crime and in the landscape of the dream-image, the collective desiring unconscious of a nation.

## CHAPTER FOUR: VIOLENCE AT A DISTANCE: *YAJŪ NO SEISHUN*

### INTRODUCTION

The first five minutes of Suzuki's early masterpiece, *Yajū no seishun/Youth of the Beast* (1963), consists of three short sequences, each jarringly distinct in editing, pacing, and mise-en-scène. These sequences function as 'master keys' to the interpretation of the film as a whole. The first sequence, following the titles, is in black and white and depicts a crime scene at one of Tokyo's 'love hotels': an apparent double suicide between a young singer and an older policeman. The sequence is full of partially obscured or opaque imagery. The opening shot begins with the white coat of an unidentified man blocking the view, who quickly moves off-screen to reveal the strewn corpse of the policeman. The camera then pans upward to reveal what was previously hidden from view: the corpse of the young woman. The white coat passes through the frame again and the camera travels off-screen right to follow it, only to reframe on a strange diamond shaped window-pane, with the partially obscured countenance of a detective peering out.



4:1 Out of the Shadows: the obscured world of the 1950s crime thriller



A reverse-angle medium shot reveals in full two middle-aged detectives who are examining the crime scene. They have been peering out the window because a small crowd of quiet onlookers has gathered on the other side of it. As one detective reads what appears to be a suicide note, the camera tracks to follow the other detective as he methodically covers the window with curtains, as if to cut off and maintain control of the visibility that the harmless onlookers are seeking.



4:2 Authoritarian Containment of Public Information

The same detective turns toward the other, looks down at the corpse, and says wistfully, ‘At least there’s some benefit in having been loved by a woman that much. I wonder what the hell he did,’ i.e. to deserve such love.<sup>1</sup> The other detective agrees; it is, after all, a perfectly typical sentiment in Japanese melodrama, whether pre-war or post-war, criminal or romantic.

As it turns out, the thick detectives are looking at a double murder framed to *look* like a suicide. Their sentiment is wrongheaded and perpetuates a lie. This black and white sequence depicts an old world of romantic and moral absolutes. To be sure, this

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<sup>1</sup> The translation is mine.

reflects a post-war Japanese fascination with American hard-boiled detective fiction,<sup>2</sup> in which Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe were the knights protector of old-fashioned values against the fast, loose culture of urban lesiure. At the same time, it represents a pre-war Japanese landscape in which ‘things were as they seem,’ epistemically and ideologically, and in which double suicide could still be regarded as an aesthetic, erotic, even moral apotheosis. But Suzuki’s film will soon undercut this perspective. Already we have seen a certain opacity to these compositions which complements the dubious attempt by the police to conceal, control, and interpret facts on behalf of the public. As the authoritarian detectives think romantic thoughts, there is a cut to a drawing table, on which a single camellia reaches out from a table full of sordid evidence: drugs, beer, and playing cards. The camellia is saturated with hand-painted colour in an otherwise completely monochrome composition. The final shot of the sequence follows, a close-up on the unhappy countenance of the dead policeman.



4:3 Out of the Past: the hand-painted red camellia links the otherwise contrary monochrome and colour sequences

With an abrupt cut, the second sequence erupts upon us in full colour. A group of young schoolgirls at a local train station are doubled over and laughing hysterically,

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis; also Kagami Saburō, ed., *Hādoboirudo no tanteitachi* (Tokyo: Pashifika, 1979).

as if making light of the deadly melodrama of the previous shot. We are no longer in the same social or aesthetic universe as that of the police detectives. It is as if the older state of things has exploded from an excess of youthful desire out of sync with the social order.



4.4: Everything Out in the Open: the second sequence of *Yajū no seishun*

In a series of eight shots, the sequence quickly goes about its main business: violence and brutality (*bōryoku*). A shot lasting merely two seconds shows a young man emerging from the station to meet the girls. Rather than developing this narrative in a conventional manner, however, Suzuki cuts to an extreme long shot of a busy street corner where some roistering youths, possibly those from the station, are milling around. A stranger in a black trench coat appears and knocks down three of the teenagers with his fists.



4:5 Violence at a Distance: a brutal, unidentified protagonist

He kicks one repeatedly in the head and we cut to a harshly angled shot of the bloodied and prostrate youth as the stranger wipes the blood from his shoe on the young man's shirt. For a 1963 film, this was excessive brutality, all the more so because rapid cutting and obscure composition make it arbitrary: the viewer is unable to identify the characters or even the situation. The stranger is shot only from behind as he walks away from the scene. Another abrupt cut then brings us to a pachinko parlour. The stranger in black, seen only from below the knee, steps on the hand of a customer who has attempted to retrieve a pachinko ball from under the stranger's feet. The next shot is the exterior of a cabaret club. Inside, the stranger in black is revealed as Shishido Jō, a familiar face to moviegoers, as he intimidates an unfortunate waiter. Later, surrounded by a group of hostesses, the inebriated stranger stuffs a wad of bills into the bra of the most demure and self-possessed of the women. She is unimpressed, so the stranger pours a bucket of ice down her dress.

As Shishido bullies this woman, there is a startling transition to a third sequence. The stranger is still in the cabaret, yet now we are viewing him from an entirely different place. The giant mirror forming the wall of the cabaret is in fact a one-way

mirror, and on the other side of it an elegant woman and some well-dressed gangsters are observing the stranger through this vast, partitioned observation window.



4:6 The Third Sequence: the narrative as viewed through a one-way mirror

In place of the short cuts of the previous sequence, the new location is revealed in a complex travelling shot lasting 40 seconds. The room is soundproof, so that the criminals (and the viewer) observe Shishido's offensive behaviour in dead silence, through the mediation of the partitioned screen. Two minutes later, following some expository dialogue, the gangsters operate state of the art recording equipment in order to restore the music and sounds of the cabaret. The criminals, like the police, are in the business of controlling information.

Each sequence announces a certain theme which carries through the rest of the film. The first 'detective' scene is a kind of 'generic quotation' and initiates a discourse on film and literary genres and their potential transformation. The second sequence problematizes the representation and aesthetics of (gendered) violence in the Japanese cinema. The third sequence, in its consideration of the relation between power and visibility, is also 'transparently' an allegory of cinematic practice in light of the issues raised in the previous sequences.

The three sections of this chapter correspond to these three sequences and the motifs that they embody. The first section introduces *Yajū no seishun* in terms of its negotiation of the influence of international hard-boiled fiction via the American *film noir*, focusing particularly on their common representation of a coercive post-war ‘information society’. The second section, while concluding that Suzuki’s film is ambiguous in its representation of gendered violence, examines how such spectacle is critically deployed to represent a crisis of post-war Japanese masculinity embodied by Shishido’s troubled protagonist. In the third section, I argue that allegory of the mirror-screen in the third sequence contemplates the nature of cinematic eroticism and the inherent polysemy of the cinematic image, and in doing so represents a new departure for Suzuki’s aesthetic into the territory of radical self-reflexivity.

## I. THE JAPANESE ARE MAKING *NOIRS* TOO

Suitable to its interrogation of the legacy of hard-boiled fiction and crime and detection films, the opening ‘detective’ sequence introduces two major motifs that carry through the rest of the film: the nature of authority (the police) and the problem of (mis)information (Figure 4.2). It also initiates a dialectic of old and new, black and white and colour, stasis and movement, cultural permanence and cultural change. It is a dialectic, not a mere opposition, because elements of the first two sequences blend into one other: the red camellia (Figure 4.3) ‘sticks out’ of the monochrome hard-boiled milieu and acts as a thread that leads into the colour sequences that follow, until it returns in the film’s final image. The hard-boiled stranger in the black trench coat ‘sticks out’ like a sore thumb amongst the hip denizens of a colourful modern Tokyo (Figure 4.5), encased on all sides by advertisements and centres of consumer diversion, including pachinko, cabaret, strip shows and, in another self-reflexive gesture, a Nikkatsu cinema in Asakusa advertising movie stars including Shishido

himself. With this example in mind, it is suitable to begin this section by contemplating how Suzuki's film declares and negotiates the influence of cinematic genres, before examining how Suzuki deploys these genre aesthetics in the service of social allegory.

### *Hard-Boiled and Noir*

Suzuki has recently acknowledged the direct influence of the American crime writer Dashiell Hammett.<sup>3</sup> Hammett also looms large over the 1962 novel *Hitokari/Manhunt*, by Ōyabu Haruhiko, on which *Yajū no seishun* was based.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the post-war decade, translations of Hammett, Chandler, Spillane, and others exploded on the Japanese literary scene, and with his 1958 novella *Yajū no shisu beshi/The Beast Must Die*, the young Ōyabu was one of the first Japanese writers to make a career by adapting the 'Western' hard-boiled style to the liminal, criminal spaces of Tokyo. This almost immediately led to competing series of films based on the author's work at Tōhō and at Nikkatsu under the direction of Noguchi Hiroshi. We must therefore view *Yajū no seishun* (1963) as marking both the beginning and the end of a *hādo-boirudo* cycle in Japanese film. Although it straggled on as a sub-genre until at least 1962, the initial cycle of films dominated by Noguchi in the mid-fifties quickly waned in popularity in favour of the more variegated and generic 'Nikkatsu *akushon*' brand which arguably began as early as 1957.<sup>5</sup> With the development of its 'Diamond Line' of the most popular movie stars in Japan (Ishihara Yūjirō, Kobayashi Akira, Akagi Keihachirō), Nikkatsu was more interested in

<sup>3</sup> Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, eds. *Sei/jun/ei/ga*. Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Ōyabu Haruhiko (1935-1996), influential short story writer and novelist of crime scenarios, was born in colonial Seoul and returned to Japan to suffer its post-war depredations. A reader of American crime fiction, Ōyabu attended Waseda University and published his *Yajū no shisu beshi* in a University magazine where, surprisingly, it quickly became a phenomenon and later a series. It was adapted to film a year later by Sukawa Eizō at Tōhō, and in the same year Noguchi Hiroshi adapted a subsequent story for his film *Machi ga nemuru toki/When the City Sleeps*. Ōyabu became a prolific writer who continued to publish successfully until his death. His 1962 story collection *Tantei jimusho 23* (published by Shinchōsha) immediately inspired Suzuki's rather more comic film of the same name. See further the entry by Carlos and Daniel Aguilar in Roberto Cueto, ed., *Japón en negro* (Festival Internacional de Cine de Donostia-San Sebastián, 2008), p. 469.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Three for the context of these early 1950s 'hard-boiled' films.

promoting likeable personalities than hard-boiled melodrama, and as early as 1959 the *Kenjū buraichō/Tales of a Gunman* series (created by Noguchi himself) series began to tone down the hard-boiled context of these films in order to present a more ‘moral’ and ‘audience-friendly’ gunman.<sup>6</sup> With the tougher black and white thrillers of the 1950s now out-of-fashion, Suzuki’s colourful *Yajū no seishun* emerged at a crucial time and had an unexpected impact on studio genre production. By 1964, Nikkatsu *akushon* was striving to reinvent itself for a shrinking audience, and new films tended to go in various directions: some presented formulaic variations on the popular Bond films, a trend which Suzuki mocks in *Yajū no seishun* with its cat-stroking super-villain Nomoto (played by Kobayashi Akiji). But Shishido Jō’s stunning performance, combined with the ‘contemporary’ feel of Suzuki’s film, led to a significant resurgence in (largely black and white) crime thrillers, about professional criminals, that worked counter to these trends.<sup>7</sup> *Yajū no seishun* in fact established Shishido as a leading dramatic actor. Having recently graduated from the role of the villain or comic second lead into a light leading man, Shishido employed his newer, tougher persona as the star of over a dozen of these ‘new’ *hādo-boirudo* films of the 1960s,<sup>8</sup> some of them directed by Suzuki’s former assistants.

Although allegedly not commercially successful on its initial release,<sup>9</sup> *Yajū no seishun* was nevertheless on the critical radar. *Eiga hyōron*’s Nakahara Yumihiko called it an ‘action film aimed at art theatre.’<sup>10</sup> It was the second Suzuki film of the decade which *Kinema junpō* deigned to include in their review section, although the

<sup>6</sup> Mark Schilling, *No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*, revised edition (London: FAB Press, 2009), pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most notable were Furukawa Takumi’s *Kenjū zankoku monogatari/Cruel Gun Story* (1964), also from an Ōyabu novel, and Nomura Takashi’s *Koruto wa ore no pasupōto/A Colt is My Passport* (1967).

<sup>8</sup> Watanabe Tadenobu, *Nikkatsu akushon no kareina sekai vol. 2 1963-1967* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1982), pp. 115-6.

<sup>9</sup> According to Nakahara Yumihiko, *Eiga hyōron* (July 1963), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Nakahara, p. 35.



director himself was given only a passing mention.<sup>11</sup> And as a hybrid, transnational revision of the already hybrid, transnational mode of 'hard-boiled', the film has claims to international significance, not least because its aesthetic 'newness' would serve as a point of departure for what I call the Suzuki Difference, a set of bold stylistic experiments which would appear with great consistency from this point forwards. But while the director's subsequent films took the road of genre pastiche and conceptual provocation (rather like his contemporary Jean-Luc Godard in *Alphaville* and *Pierrot le Fou*, both 1965), *Yajū no seishun* is a contradictory text that in part attempts a serious and purposeful reformulation of genre. Both American and Japanese hard-boiled films are radically retooled for a new era. In addition to hard-boiled literature, Suzuki was also profoundly aware of films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) and *Night and the City* (Jules Dassin, 1950), which, for the French, had become key representatives of the critical discourse of *film noir*.<sup>12</sup> Although unaware of these discourses or the term *film noir*, Suzuki's film remains a direct engagement with these American predecessors. Suzuki has said that when he started at Shōchiku in 1948 he was ignorant of even such important American filmmakers as Huston.<sup>13</sup> This is an indirect way of indicating that by the time Suzuki had reached artistic maturity as director in the early 1960s, he had seen and learned from Huston and the American thriller. *Yajū no seishun* (1963) is, among other things, a critical revision of *The Maltese Falcon*.

It may be too late to insert Suzuki and the Japanese hard-boiled film into the highly contested yet expansive category of *film noir* (as Roberto Cueto has recently

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki's films of the 1950s were often reviewed in *Kinema junpō* only because the editorial policy of the time was to present shorter reviews of nearly every major studio release. When the magazine's review policy became more selective around 1960, Suzuki's films disappeared from the magazine.

<sup>12</sup> Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *A Panorama of American Film Noir 1941-1953*, translated by Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2002 [1955]), pp. 92-93, 34-35.

<sup>13</sup> interview in Chris Desjardins, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Cinema* (I.B. Taurus, 2005), p. 145.

attempted to do),<sup>14</sup> and many critics would question the usefulness of doing so. On the other hand, there is a certain inadequacy inherent in the Western and Eurocentric focus of *film noir* criticism, then as now, which ought to be addressed. It is significant that Noguchi Hiroshi had been directing urban crime thrillers such as *Ore no kenjū wa subayai* (1954) during the heyday of American *noir*, while Suzuki was making dark variations on these thrillers, with a psychological emphasis and a low-key aesthetic, as early as 1957, before such critical touchstones of *noir* as *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Robert Wise, 1957) and *Murder By Contract* (Irving Lerner, 1958). The 1950s Japanese *hādo-boirudo* was therefore historically co-extensive with late American *noir*: it did not represent a post-facto revisionism. Although a slightly later and more self-conscious reflection on American crime films, *Yajū no seishun* has exactly those qualities which the surrealist-influenced French critics praised in American *film noir*. As James Naremore puts it, *film noir* ‘was a kind of modernism in the popular cinema: it used unorthodox narration; it resisted sentiment and censorship; it revelled in the ‘social fantastic’...[and] the ambiguity of human motives; it made commodity culture seem like a wasteland.’<sup>15</sup>

Although it is preferable, given the contested usage and delimitation of the term *film noir*, to represent *Yajū no seishun* and other Nikkatsu films by a term from contemporary Japanese discourses such as *hādo-boirudo*, it is no less true that the greatly under-theorized hard-boiled film in Japan (which stretches from Kurosawa to *nuberu bagu* directors like Shinoda) was roughly coextensive and coterminous with both American and European *noir*. By comparison, then, Japanese hard-boiled films can help us extend and perhaps to retool our understanding of *film noir* as much as *noir* can help us to understand the Japanese *hādo-boirudo*. Indeed, since *Yajū no seishun* is a dialogue with the American crime thriller and an extension of its aesthetic

<sup>14</sup> Cueto, 'Shades of Black: A Brief Introduction to Japanese crime films' in Cueto, ed., *Japón en negro* (Festival Internacional de Cine de Donostia-San Sebastián, 2008), pp. 267-271

<sup>15</sup> James Naremore, *More Than Night* (University of California, Berkeley Press, 1998), p. 38.

milieu into new areas of colour and reflexive allegory, Suzuki's dominant contribution to *hādo-boirudo* threatens to necessitate a revision of a Hollywood- and Euro-centric critical history of *film noir*. Naremore has written the following of Hollywood's *neo-noir* cycle:

*Taxi Driver* [Scorsese, 1976] belongs in company with several...productions of the decade—including the *The Long Goodbye* and *Chinatown*—which were made with the nostalgic idea of film noir in mind. However, despite its allusiveness and almost scholarly self-awareness, it is neither a period movie nor a pastiche. Instead...it transforms what Schrader regards as definitive *film noir* into a kind of neo-expressionism that is ideally suited to colour and widescreens.<sup>16</sup>

Rather like Altman's belated *Long Goodbye* (1973), one must consider *Yajū no seishun* a sort of 'nostalgic rejection' of American *noir* (and its Japanese counterpart), a conclusion that their aesthetic is inadequate to 'post-postwar' social representation and must be replaced by a freer form of cinematic presentation. Nevertheless, has not Suzuki's brutal yet 'self-aware' film, composed in widescreen and bold primary colours and 'neither a period recreation nor pastiche,' anticipated by more than a decade the revisionism for which Scorsese, Schrader, and Polanski have been so widely celebrated?



4:7 Transforming *Film Noir*...into a kind of neo-expressionism...ideally suited to colour and widescreens': Kawachi Tamio calmly slashes his opponent's face amidst a splash of colours

<sup>16</sup> Naremore, p. 36.

### *Information Networks and the 'Big Lie'*

In this section I shall propose a concrete example of how Suzuki adapts and revises the *film noir* of his American predecessors. As discussed above, the theme of (mis)information dominates the first three sequences of *Yajū no seishun*. Like late *noir* films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), *Yajū no seishun* critiques the social effect of information technologies: the gangsters and police operate hidden telephone networks, tape recorders, microphones, and one-way mirrors. None of this technology seems to clear up the misrecognition that bedevils a deceitful urban milieu which seems to be going wildly off track. The cop killers go unpunished, while the ex-detective Mizuno Jō (Shishido) is able to hide his identity from the two *yakuza* factions, in a bewildering game of feint and double-feint, long enough to destroy them both. Jō seeks the hidden secrets of the Nomoto operation, which lie at the end of a mysterious telephone number. But the telephone keeps *misdirecting* him, along with the viewer, even to the point where the investigation structure of the film itself get lost in a bewildering accumulation of sub-plots and incidents.



4:8 The (Mis)Information Society: Mizuno (Shishido Jō) continually directed to the 'wrong number'

The gangsters themselves are unable to *recognize* Jō as being any different from themselves. This leads to their downfall, but they also have a point. When it comes to misdirecting information and extracting it from others, Jō is the best player in the game. He seduces (or more accurately, *counter-seduces*) Nomoto's wife for information, coerces secrets out of his friends, and finally catches the murderer by means of a tape recorder which dominates the *mise-en-scène* of the film's final sequence. These activities seem to relate him to the criminals, not simply on account of his callous brutality, but in his complicit exploitation of post-war networks and technologies of power. This is highly reminiscent of Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* and Anatole Litvak's *Sorry Wrong Number* (1948). In Aldrich's evolution of *film noir*, detective Mike Hammer is not so much a lone wolf as a key strategist in a great electronic network that grants anonymity to the clever. J.P. Telotte observes that the weakness of this flawed protagonist lies in his failure at personal communication, for communication has been reduced to 'information,' a tool of power and 'a thing or commodity to be extracted' from unwilling subjects, rather than a natural and constructive process.<sup>17</sup> Mizuno Jō also objectifies communication as he approaches it through deception or, more frighteningly, through interrogation. As a cop, Mizuno once 'questioned' a suspect so hard 'that he couldn't speak anymore.' Utilizing 'righteous' violence in the search for the killer of his partner and surrogate father, Jō would like to view himself as an upholder of older masculine virtues in contradistinction to post-war mores embodied by a ruthless gang of women, sadomasochists, and homosexuals who exploit desire. But Jō, like all cops and *yakuza*, deals in the business of domination. He imposes repression so fanatically that it becomes *annihilation*, and therefore self-defeating: the subject can no longer speak, and Mizuno learns nothing.

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<sup>17</sup> J.P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir* (University of Illinois, 1989), p. 203.

Jō deals in the business of lying, and for Suzuki, ‘the big lie’ is precisely what establishes a continuity between pre-war censorship and post-war capitalism, the regime of the commodity. Unwittingly, Jō participates in capitalism’s fragmentation and consequent domination of subjectivity. This may be inevitable, for how can one escape the literal ‘mechanisms’ by which society now operates? But by linking Jō’s romantic defence of older values (so often a posture of Japan’s pro-corporate Liberal Democratic Party) to domination, deception, and complicity, Suzuki threatens to overturn what the independent ‘lone-wolf’ detective of hard-boiled fiction seems to stand for.

Electronic technologies and their malfunction had a particular resonance in 1960s Japan. They function as dystopian metaphors for a society which is both ‘misdirected’ and more reliant than ever on information and surveillance for the maintenance of power. Marilyn Ivy writes that the 1960s ‘witnessed the first coherent policy studies of the “information society” (*jōhō shakai*) in which government...and think tanks outlined their plans for the coming shift towards information industries—computers, robotics, new media networks, automated production systems.’<sup>18</sup> How much of this shift Suzuki could have known or understood is questionable, but he would have been sensitive to the fact that Tokyo Tower (which dominates the *mise-en-scène* of *Tokyo nagaremono*) was initially planned as an electronic transmitter even as it announced the economic ascendancy of Japan within the international marketplace, in part due to the success of companies like Sony. From this film onwards, Suzuki’s films magnify the conspiratorial notion that excess among the consumer generation (the hysterical teenagers of the film’s second sequence) benefited Japan’s patriarchal institutions who, through organized collusion between bureaucracy, monopoly corporations, and the *yakuza*, were thus able to mass produce both the objects and, to a great extent, the

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<sup>18</sup> Ivy, ‘Formations of Mass Culture’ in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Post-war Japan as History*. (University of California Berkeley, 1993), p. 250.

subjects of desire. Nikkatsu's mostly escapist entertainments, which created and advertised pop records, gossip magazines, and the nation's biggest celebrities, were hardly irrelevant to this process; while Tōei's *ninkyō* pictures, often financially backed by the *yakuza* themselves, were downright suspect.<sup>19</sup> Thus Suzuki, by adapting an American *noir* motif of misdirected communication, advances a prescient social criticism, even while demonstrating the need to replace the aesthetics of hard-boiled thrillers with a more direct and self-reflexive form which could represent and even criticize a media society by considering the cinematic process itself.

## II. MASCULINITY IN CRISIS

The second sequence of the film, described above, presents a fresh and definitive image of violence and masculinity at a specific post-war moment (the prosperous early 1960s). The girls at the train station, it turns out, are waiting for a young and frivolous *chinpira* (punk). This *taiyōzoku* character gets kicked in the head by Shishido's stranger,<sup>20</sup> who represents a masculinity more representative of the establishment: pent-up, anxious, and eternally rebelling against post-war modernity, yet not out of nihilism or social marginalization. Instead, he has a kind of fanatical nostalgia for values that society has passed by.

Just as Suzuki's evasive *mise-en-scène* does not reveal the face of this stranger until the end of the sequence, so the narrative waits for more than forty minutes before we learn that he is an ex-cop who has joined the *yakuza* in order to discover and take revenge on the murderer of his partner. This strategy inhibits the possibility of

<sup>19</sup> These are, of course, legally unsubstantiated allegations, but for the testimony of insiders such as Fukasaku Kinji, especially as regards the criminal connections of producer Shundō Kōji, see Federico Varese, 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema: Yakuza Movies', *Global Crime* v. 7:1 (February 2006), p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> The character, who shortly disappears from the film, may represent the teenage protagonists of Nikkatsu's popular *taiyōzoku* (Sun Tribe) films of the 1950s. These protagonists appeared in the form of either hedonist leisure class teens in writer Ishihara Shintarō's *Taiyō no kisetsu/Season of the Sun* (1956) or hedonist, lawless, lower class rebels in Kurahara's uncompromising *Kyonetsu no Kisetsu/Season of Heat* (1960).

empathetic identification as it refuses to illustrate the contexts and motives of a protagonist who intimidates women and kicks teenagers in the head while wiping his dirty shoe on their chests. With Mizuno's past as an ex-detective withheld from us, the cinema's conventional 'hero morality' cannot bridge this empathetic gap.

If Mizuno is an unsympathetic (if humorously outrageous character), he is understandable as an avatar of the reactionary imagination, a middle-aged fantasy of stoic masculinity able to contain the *imagined* causes of post-war social anxiety and urban malaise: sexually liberated women, open homosexuality, wild teenagers. However, Suzuki's mise-en-scène holds this male fantasy at a critical distance from the beginning. The sequence of violence discussed in the previous section is filmed in detached, extreme long shot and with 'grotesque' camera angles that obscure our view of the situation while heightening the brutality of the stranger's actions.<sup>21</sup> This mise-en-scène, which contains not a single POV shot, hinders the triple identification of viewer=camera=male protagonist,<sup>22</sup> denying the viewer the impression of mastery over the visual and narrative content of the film which, for many film theorists of the 1970s, was the precondition for identification and ideological alignment with characters. Even if we turn to an alternate, cognitive theory of cinematic identification such as that of Murray D. Smith,<sup>23</sup> the inability to identify with Mizuno's context, thoughts, and often feelings, is crucial to understanding the film's disposition towards a masculinity that erupts into gendered violence.

<sup>21</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 165.

<sup>22</sup> According to the psychoanalytic film theory of the 1970s, this multi-tier identification was the lynchpin of the mainstream cinema's ideological operations. In Laura Mulvey's view (to simplify somewhat for purposes of this chapter), this form of identification served in particular to construct a male protagonist as a pleasurable ego ideal and hence justify his (largely reactionary) behaviour towards women. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: MacMillan, 1989), pp. 16-21. 25-26

<sup>23</sup> For Smith, sympathetic engagement with a character requires *recognition* of the character as a whole and continuous individual, *alignment* of the viewer with a representation of character's thoughts and feelings, and *allegiance* through which the viewer assents to one character's POV over another's. Using this schema, Mizuno is identifiable on the basic level but not on the higher levels of Smith's taxonomy, except in cases of basic empathetic responses such as fear. Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 81-86. cf. Chapters 4-6 of that work, and also Amy Coplan's comparative assessment of identification strategies, 'Empathy and Character Engagement,' in *The Routledge Companion to Film and Philosophy*, edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge 2009), pp. 102-103.



Consider the central example of the cabaret and mirror scene in which Mizuno meets Mrs. Nomoto. Cabaret scenes often seem essential to the world of *film noir*: in films like *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) and *Rififi* (Dassin, 1955), the nightclub scenes depend, in more or less the way that Mulvey has proposed, on identification with the hero and his POV in order to establish the erotic gaze at the female performer, initiating a play of gazes and aligning his erotic desire with the pleasure of the viewer. In Mulvey's view, this normalizes not only voyeurism, but a hierarchy of social relations.<sup>24</sup> But in the differential cabaret scene presented by Suzuki, Mizuno is seen only in long shot as he carouses with various women, with again no usage of POV. When the camera cuts from the cabaret set to the gangster headquarters behind the one-way mirror, it is a woman, the powerful Mrs. Nomoto (Kazuki Minako), who is the voyeur behind the mirror, gazing at Mizuno and at the entire cabaret spectacle as if controlling it. The scene takes place in silence, but in another reversal of convention, silence is equated not with female submissiveness, but with authority and mastery of vision. The scene in fact contains several instances of Mrs. Nomoto's frankly erotic gaze, but Mizuno, for his part, makes eye contact with no one; the male gaze is never initiated.

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<sup>24</sup> This has been challenged somewhat in relation to the *noir* cabaret sequence in articles such as Richard Dyer, 'Resistance through Charisma: Rita Hayworth and *Gilda*,' in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, rev. ed. (London: BFI, 1996), pp.115-123. Certainly the formal structure of these scenes—i.e. the visual pleasure of the viewer of the female performance partially doubled by the POV of male characters—is not in question, only its ideological significance. While echoing Dyer, Alastair Phillips writes of at least the beginning of *Rififi*'s cabaret sequence that 'the male figure rests in complete mastery of the look', Phillips, *Rififi* (London: I.B Taurus), p. 51.



4:9 A Female Erotic Gaze: Mrs. Nomoto appreciates the wild Mizuno as he enters and beats up her underlings



4:10 No Return: the male protagonist does not have a close-up, or initiate a returning gaze

Mizuno compliments Mrs. Nomoto's beauty without looking at her; her gazes indicate that *some* acknowledgment of this has passed between them: but Suzuki has refused to establish this through the male POV. There are notable exceptions to this pattern as the film progresses (a scene of strategic seduction, for example), but the film as a whole does not *authorize* Mizuno's male gaze as a matter of course, transmitting an unconscious (and reactionary) fantasy, but rather, deploys it selectively and critically. The POV of Mizuno as investigator is a surrogate for the audience's (futile) quest to *make sense* of this bizarre narrative, and in that restricted sense we are aligned with

him.

When Mizuno is revealed to be an ex-cop one might argue that authority and empathy is restored to the male protagonist. Barely fifteen minutes later, however, Boss Nomoto immolates Mizuno's fingernail. In *ninkyō yakuza* films, the protagonist endures torture with stoic endurance. Here, Mizuno reacts with a very real and naked agony. The fantasy of Mizuno's heroic omnipotence is at an end: from this point, narrative and character unwind into a violent chaos as Mizuno tries and fails to control the fictive scenario of a gang war that he has created, only to find in the end that he himself has been manipulated by a woman. Suzuki presents not the fantasy of male control, but its breakdown and implosion in an excess of wild brutality. Mizuno is too deeply divided to represent any unified construct of values. Since he has put his former partner and his wife on a pedestal as idealized parents, the film's emphasis is not on man's social or psychological maturity, but on the titular 'youth' (*seishun*) of someone (Mizuno) or something (society) that has gone from human to bestial. His own rather unprofessional sadism, moreover, is mirrored by that of the villainous Nomoto brothers, who seem to act out his impulse towards violence against women. Shishido, who has physical power but no mental discipline, is a definitively 'post-war' hero of uncertainty, a mirror of the very identity crisis that moved Japanese audiences of all persuasions to take refuge in the heroism of Mifune Toshirō or the stoic Takakura Ken, the emerging star of Tōei's *ninkyō eiga*.<sup>25</sup> This crisis, which even at the time was labelled in the popular press as 'The Age of Neurosis' (*noirōse jidai*),<sup>26</sup> was the result of a transition, in fifteen short years, from the transcendental patriarchal values of the military state, to foreign occupation, sudden disillusionment,

<sup>25</sup> In his essay 'The Yakuza: A Primer,' Paul Schrader trenchantly described Takakura's star image as 'everything that is old, strong, and virtuous in Japan, and stands as a symbol against Westernization and compromise,' in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *The Gangster Film Reader* (New York: Limelight, 2007), p. 78. Isolde Standish offers an updated critical appraisal of Takakura's star vehicles in *A New History of Japanese Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 294-300.

<sup>26</sup> John W. Dower, 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems', in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Post-war Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 18.

and the material values of consumer culture. If Takakura's rock-hard persona is an escape from that reality, surely Shishido represents the failure of escape.

Thus Shishido embodies a specific post-war and Japanese development of *film noir*'s crisis of masculine identity. Too young to have experienced the war, Mizuno lacks perspective in confronting the post-war crisis of values. Whereas Suzuki himself was defined by his wartime past, Shishido's younger protagonist is defined by the memory of the early Occupation years (1945-7) in ruined, desolate Tokyo. Belonging to the famous 'generation without fathers,' Mizuno's post-war condition is haunted by that initial vacuum of values and identity, including the onset of anxiety about the growth of capitalism and its impact on social mores. The result is a 'troubled character of self-denial,'<sup>27</sup> clinging desperately to mythic values of male professionalism. Like Mizuno, the criminal Nomoto brothers are haunted by their deceased and inadequate mother, who was a *yōpan* (a prostitute specializing in American soldiers), and as a result are pathologically anxious about their own masculinity. They operate a sleek, modernised gangster operation, devoid of traditional *yakuza* iconography and portrayed in highly fetishistic visual terms.

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<sup>27</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 167.



4:11 Modernity as Fetish: the Nomoto operation characterized by gaudy colours, ostentatious or eroticized objects of modern art, surfaces as smooth and polished as Boss Nomoto's fancy throwing knives

This is contrasted with the *yakuza* faction of Onodera (Shin Kinzō),<sup>28</sup> whose Asakusa-based gang wears tattoos and traditional robes. Onodera dies, symbolically, in a *kamikaze* attack with a bomb-laden car, a parodic representation of the war experience and the death of Old Japan. Suzuki represents both the pre- and post-war generations as symbolically 'impotent,' with Jō anxiously stranded in between.

### *Violence and the Containment of the Feminine*

Mizuno's strongest adversaries prove to be two women on the wrong side of the law: Mrs. Nomoto and Mrs. Takeshita (Watanabe Misako), wife of the slain policemen and Nomoto's mysterious '7<sup>th</sup> Mistress,' who is secretly in charge of the entire operation. As the second half of the film initiates an increasingly frenetic and violent narrative, itself resembling masculinity in crisis, the male characters struggle to contain this feminine power. This results in two frightening yet unforgettable scenes of gendered violence, and it is the nominal hero, Mizuno, who exacts the most terrible vengeance on Mrs. Takeshita, the killer of his father figure.

<sup>28</sup> Shin, a Suzuki regular, played essentially the same wizened and literally impotent gang boss in *Kutabare akutō-domo: Tantei jimusho 2-3* (1963). His character in *Yajū no seishun* is more comically ineffectual. cf. Isolde Standish on the satirical motif of male impotence in the 1960s cinema in her *Politics, Porn and Protest* (New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 95-113.

In the first scene, Boss Nomoto whips his scheming wife on a velvet red carpet, then throws her into a tuft of reeds in the backyard; they have sex. The violence has a ludic aspect: when his subordinates try to leave the room the excited Nomoto tells them to ‘Shut up and watch’. One gangster indicates that he has seen this kind of exhibition before. While they make love on the reeds, a cloud of dust with an unnatural yellow colour wafts over them in one of Suzuki’s most interesting non-diegetic effects up to that time.



4:12 Gendered Violence in a Non-Diegetic Yellow Dust Cloud

The masculine anxiety underlying the violence is not covert, but in fact emphasised by the script, while the detective hero is also problematically implicated in the scene, not as a ‘phallic agent,’ but as a fascinated voyeur. If the sequence distresses us with the sadism of the powerful, Suzuki is also clearly attuned to the subversive political provocations of violent and extreme sexuality, like the surrealists and like his younger contemporary Wakamatsu Koji, who began making politicized sex films in 1963.<sup>29</sup> As with these *auteurs* and the political *auteurs* of the later

<sup>29</sup> Borde and Chaumeton, who had extensive surrealist credentials, considered ‘the eroticization of violence’ through the figure of the *femme fatale* as one of the most provocative contributions of *film noir* to the cinema; Standish, *Politics, Porn, and Protest*, offers a mildly critical view of Wakamatsu’s films and the

Nikkatsu *roman poruno*, it is certainly possible to construct a reading of *Yajū no seishun* that is thoroughly misogynist.<sup>30</sup> Whether one subscribes to one interpretation or the other may depend on whether one views the scene as a form of rape, or as a sadomasochistic game between marital extremists in violation of sexual propriety.

Suzuki is certainly working within a set of exploitative hard-boiled conventions.<sup>31</sup> His film questions hard-boiled ethics, in particular the neutrality of the detective himself, but does not negate them in an unambiguous fashion. But then again, Suzuki of all directors refuses the possibility of a constructive ‘message’ to his films,<sup>32</sup> even when such literal readings might be comforting in the face of misogynist violence. Suzuki said in 1972 that a director must not ‘drag’ his audience, that is, push and manipulate the viewer towards a certain conclusion.<sup>33</sup> Because our search for an authorial disposition centres not on the studio-mandated script but on visual interpolations like the unexplained yellow dust cloud, audiences are free to develop such metaphors in different ways according to their perspective, or simply to see reflected those values (including radical values) that they have brought with them to the cinema. Suzuki takes the ideally ‘democratic’ neutrality of popular studio cinema to a new extreme in which narrative structures of moral and political judgement, left or right, are no longer in place.

Nevertheless, as I hope to show, the visual subtext of the film, and its unsympathetic protagonist, counter what might in other hands be a justification of gendered violence through an appeal to law and order (the hard-boiled tradition) or

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political/polemical figure of the marginalized rapist, pp. 103-107, 113-4. Noël Burch’s strong critique also remains relevant, in *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), pp. 351-355

<sup>30</sup> For a socio-psychological reading of violence against women in Japanese genre films, see Brian Moeran, ‘The Beauty of Violence: *Jidai-geki*, *Yakuza*, and *ero-duction* Films in Japan’ in David Riches, ed., *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 103-118.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Chandler has his hero, Philip Marlowe, state economically that ‘women make me sick’, in *The Big Sleep* (New York: Vintage, 1988 [1939], p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> Suzuki, *Kenka ereji*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 2003), p. 129.

through a deeper appeal to mythic structures of the sacrifice of women-as-symbol.<sup>34</sup> When Jō discovers that Mrs. Takeshita is the power behind the throne, manipulating Nomoto and murdering her husband and a young dancer, his response to the discovery is strange and horrible. With his signature deceit, Jō coerces Mrs. Takeshita into denouncing Nomoto while the younger Nomoto brother Hideo (Kawachi Tamio) is listening. She calls Nomoto's mother 'a whore who specialized in black men,' which enrages the unbalanced Hideo. Jō then locks the two of them together in Mrs. Takeshita's parlour room, while Hideo, acting out his childhood horror of female sexuality, slashes Mrs. Takeshita's face with a razor blade. The violence occurs off-screen, while Jō stands outside the door with a look of disbelief on his face, as if marvelling at his own capacity for cruelty. Finally, he reveals that he has recorded everything on a tape recorder, which he plays over the phone for the police.

The lighting (like the yellow dust) gives the scene a dreamlike quality. Mrs. Takeshita's apartment is excessively dark, with large areas of deep shadow, seemingly from a non-diegetic source, cast on the walls. Violence in Suzuki is almost never treated as realism, but is marked out by the *mise-en-scène* as a kind of social and ideological fantasy. While Jō listens to the violence behind the door, the exquisite lighting of Nagatsuka Kazue and Onishi Mitsu creates a harsh, jagged shadow over his eyes.

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<sup>34</sup> cf. Moeran, pp. 104, 111-2.





4.13: The Hooded Eyes of the Vigilante 1

This gesture may be an homage to John Ford's *The Searchers* (which Suzuki considered to be the greatest American 'action film').<sup>35</sup> At one point in that film, John Wayne's Ethan Edwards gazes at a white woman who has been driven mad by culture shock. After becoming fully integrated into Comanche society, she has been unwillingly recaptured by white soldiers. As Ethan looks at her, his hat creates a sinister band of shadow appears across his violent eyes.



4.14 The Hooded Eyes of the Vigilante 2: note the similarity of composition, including the bisected background

<sup>35</sup> Niogret, Hubert. 'Entretien avec Seijun Suzuki.' *Positif* n. 352 (June 1990): pp. 27-28.

The gesture betrays Ethan's obsession with 'miscegenation', an obsession so strong that he is willing to kill his own niece because she has become the wife of a Comanche. Ethan will do anything to maintain a 'code' or a set of borders (racial, familial, and concerning legitimate/illegitimate violence) that he feels has been violated, perhaps because it is these very borders which allows a violent outlaw like Edwards to feel justified vis-à-vis his 'Othered' enemies.<sup>36</sup>

It seems to be exactly this point at play in *Yajū no seishun*, an 'adults-only' film by design, with a director who reflexively contemplates borders and transgressions in cinematic representation.<sup>37</sup> In the Japanese post-war context, the borders in question pertain not only to class and race, but to the patriarchal regulation of gender roles. Jō has turned down the chance to kill Nomoto and his actions will allow Hideo to escape scot-free; Mrs. Takeshita is the sole object of 'punishment.' Why not simply turn her into the police? Instead siding with Hideo the pimp, Jō acts desperately to contain the emasculating social and sexual power of the female. Mrs. Takeshita had represented Jō's last contact with 'decency' and social/moral 'legitimacy'. When she crosses from 'mother' figure, the supposed embodiment of civilization, to 'whore,' his violent reaction betrays a desperate desire to retain his own faltering identity as a 'decent' member of the middle class, in opposition to the underclass of gangsters and 'deviants' who surround him. Part of this reactionary fantasy of decency is the legacy of the 'loyal wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) social code established by the Meiji patriarchal order and in force until the end of the war. Although *ryōsai kenbo* was technically outlawed by the post-war government as an unwelcome phrase from the

<sup>36</sup> See J.P. Telotte, 'A Fate Worse Than Death: Racism, Transgression, and Westerns,' *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 26:3 (January 1998), pp. 120-127, on the significance of 'borders' in the confrontations between whites and native americans in the Fordian Western.

<sup>37</sup> Nikkatsu planned the film as one of the first to bear an 'Adults Only' certificate. Upon its completion, however, the studio lost its nerve and excised scenes of female nudity and brutal violence. The censors at *Eirin* were still distressed by the film, and despite further cuts, it remained a shocking film for 1963, even despite the rather mild beginnings of the 'torture exploitation' genre at other studios in the late 1950s. One memorable scene involving a knife inserted into Shishido's fingernail was awkwardly affected by the censorship, while, ironically, some of the gory excised footage found its way into the trailer. Suzuki's aggressively violent, dehumanizing original cut of the final sequence, which was also censored, famously included a close-up on Mrs. Takeshita 'slashed like a Venetian blind': Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, eds., *Se/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006), p. 165, 168.

past, nevertheless, as Kathleen S. Uno describes, state education policies by the paternalistic Liberal Democratic Party encouraged the first two post-war generations of women to think of themselves primarily as 'homebound wives and mothers'.<sup>38</sup> In context, then, the concept of middle class decency that Jō inflicts on his 'mother' connotes not obedience to the law as such, which is the legitimate function of the police, but to the patriarchal Law of the Father. Even if Jō is justified in his desire to avenge the murder of a good man and an innocent girl, his excessive, gendered solution defends Japanese patriarchy against the effrontery of a woman who is simultaneously a housewife, a mistress, and a powerful criminal.

Apart from the threat to an Oedipal social structure, there is perhaps a satirical point being made about women in the 'planned society' of post-war Japan. Capitalism had a hand in proposing new forms of gender control, for in addition to being subject to new social mores concerning role prescription and household domestication, women were *also* the principal target of advertising. Mrs. Takeshita's *noirish* and lonely house contains, surprisingly, all the fashionable household goods of the late 1950s: electric oven, electric range, electric rice cooker and kettle. As Marilyn Ivy describes:

Electrical appliances fueled the consumer revolution....they became the objects of desire, the signs of middle class inclusion, the unparalleled commodity fetishes....Electric appliance manufacturers were the leading advertisers....Appliances standardized the image of the average household and what the housewife should possess....Some view this process as one of homogenization, an elimination of differences as nuclear familial units constructed themselves as micro-utopias sealed off from external conflict.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that Suzuki has grafted these metaphors of social and economic change to a hard-boiled narrative structure of vigilante detectives and *femmes fatales* is undoubtedly part of the revisionist genius of *Yajū no seishun*, but it is also a cause of

<sup>38</sup> This applied not only to policies relating to reproductive sexuality but also to issues such as welfare, education, and employment. Uno, 'The Death of Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Post-war Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> Ivy, 'Formations of Mass Culture' in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Post-war Japan as History*, p. 249.

its fundamental ideological ambiguity. The threat to the social order presented by the hard-boiled *femme fatale* could sometimes overwhelm the intentions of her male creators, who often crudely deployed the woman-as-symbol in a 'gendered opposition to establishment culture'<sup>40</sup>. As Janey Place has written of the American *femme fatale*, 'the primary crime that the "liberated" woman is guilty of is refusing to be defined in such a way, and this refusal can be perversely seen (in art, or in life) as an attack on man's very existence.'<sup>41</sup> In *Yajū no seishun*, Mrs. Takeshita has literally mounted an attack by murdering her husband. Moreover, whereas Sylvia Harvey asserts that figures such as the prostitute in American *film noir* actually 'reconfirm the primacy of monogamy' and marriage,<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Takeshita is far more subversive since, as Nomoto's '7<sup>th</sup> Mistress', she dominates a perverse crime family in which adultery supersedes monogamy as the structuring foundation. Indeed, the murderous Mrs. Takeshita represents a kind of grotesque inversion of 'the valorization of the conjugal couple and the nuclear household'<sup>43</sup> of the post-war Japanese state. Since Mrs. Takeshita has arranged, in service of a criminal plot, a childless marriage to the police detective, first as a front for adultery, then in order to murder him and live comfortably alone in an appliance-filled house, her entire plan seems like a staged satire of post-war gender roles, a collection of conformist signifiers (husband, appliances) re-purposed in the service of her own eroticized exercise of power. Once discovered, her manipulation of domestic iconography presents, like adultery itself, a blatant challenge to patriarchy.

If nothing else, Suzuki demonstrates on no uncertain terms, like his contemporary Harold Pinter, that social control *is* violence, and Mizuno, as the reactionary avenger of the middle class, horrifically reasserts that control with the same excessive force

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<sup>40</sup> Naremore, p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> 'Women in Film Noir' in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir*, rev. ed. (London: BFI, 2008), p. 47

<sup>42</sup> 'Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir' in Kaplan, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Uno, p. 210.

that he had shown on police suspects. But there is a crucial difference here: rather than wielding the knife himself, Mizuno acts as a behind-the-scenes manipulator, an orchestrator of events through the use of the latest technology (the hand-held tape recorder). Does this not align the ex-policeman with the oligarchic planners of the 'Information Society,' putting him at one remove from the grimy foot soldiers (*yakuza* and police) who enforce these plans? Perhaps this is the reason for Shishido's ambivalent expression at the end of the film. Has Mizuno ascended to that level of power, by mastery of information, that Nomoto aspires to with his surveillance equipment? Yet even Mizuno seems to realize that the price of success is high: dehumanization.



4:15 The Face of Dehumanization? Mizuno's own revulsion towards the vigilante 'justice' he has inflicted on a mother figure

When Mizuno departs from the crime scene (and the movie), leaving a crushed red camellia in his wake, will he continue the life of the vigilante outcast, or, by the act of transmitting his recording to the police, has he nailed himself to the cross of power?

In sum, through the actions of his brutal protagonist, Suzuki acknowledges the controlling hand of patriarchy in the commercialized regime of post-war domesticity

for which the 'woman-as-housewife' was a crucial component. Because it dwells on the excessive violence of patriarchy when that regime is threatened, the film may be seen as a provocative condemnation of normative social values in relation to gender. Certainly the rapacious beast (*yajū*) of the title refers to either Mizuno or the patriarchal society-gone-mad that he is compelled to protect. On the other hand, it may be that Suzuki's images of misogynistic violence communicate the same antipathy towards a supposedly 'feminine' mass culture that high modernism and hard-boiled fiction (its disreputable brother) had shown. Did Suzuki's leftist resentment of commercialization and his feeling of betrayal by the generation of his parents (a sentiment dramatised in *Tokyo nagaremono*) leave him with a 'horror of domesticity,' reflected in images of aggression toward its feminine symbols? To put it another way: is Mrs. Takeshita being *punished* by this film in the person of Mizuno—the director of this scenario—or is she, a powerful challenger, simply the final victim of 'the beast'?

### III. AESTHETIC DEPARTURES, OR, THE POLYSEMY OF EROS

The third sequence of the film—the mirror sequence—problematizes the violence of its predecessor through the distanciation effects of partitioned windows and the manipulation of sound. The sequence disrupts identification and creates a visual spectacle (a semi-nude dancer viewed through the vast one-way mirror) in which sensual immediacy gives way to an abstraction. The presence of the mirror/screen initiates a self-reflexive allegory of cinematic practice that will come to define Suzuki's later avant-garde work. In this section I consider two facets of the allegory: the representation of voyeurism and the body, and the generally polysemic nature of cinematic spectacle.

The erotic objectification of the body is a constant throughout the sequence. As it begins, Mizuno pours a bucket of ice down a hostess' dress. But this is viewed in extreme long shot, with the camera stationed behind the one-way mirror where Mrs. Nomoto watches with voyeuristic intensity. As Mizuno is shuffled off-screen by the bouncers, the camera pans to follow him and then abruptly stops, in order to frame an empty area of the cabaret illuminated by only a small lamp. A semi-nude dancer holding gigantic purple feathers then rises up from the floor beneath the screen and unfolds the feathers like the blossoming of a flower.



4:16 Erotic Spectacle as Hyperbolic Fetishism: The Cabaret Feather-Dancer as Budding Flower

As viewed from (closely) behind the soundproof HQ, this action occurs in complete silence. Although the image is highly fetishistic, there is a hyperbolic absurdity to the staging and gaudy costume, reminiscent of the just-plain-comic 'Christmas cabaret' in *Tantei jimusho 23* (1963), which satirized the libidinal consumerism of the 1960s by dressing a dozen semi-nude dancing girls as Santa's elves.



4:17 Erotic Spectacle as Satire: Libidinal Consumerism

Furthermore, as the dancer turns to begin her routine, the camera does an intrusive flash-pan back to the HQ. Except for one brief (and strangely out-of-place) long shot of the feather dancer from *within* the cabaret, the dancer remains in the extreme background, behind the one way mirror, for the rest of this long scene that takes place in the HQ. The dancer makes an often jarring contrast to the seriousness of the violence taking place nearby, while the luxurious purple of the cabaret contrasts with the sterile off-white décor of the office. Moreover, the filmmakers have chosen to make the one-way mirror partitioned by black-lined window panes which divide it into several smaller panels, thus appearing to divide the dancer's body among the panels. In one longer shot, the black band of the window frame exactly covers the dancer's breasts.





4:18 Mediated: the erotic dancer partitioned by the mirror-screen

If the image of the dancer is an erotic one, it is certainly conducive of a far different kind of erotic sensibility than that which would be conjured by multiple close shots and partial views of the strip artist's body from *inside* the cabaret.<sup>44</sup> In other words, while it would be excessive to claim that the eccentric staging (deep background, partitioning, primary colours) somehow counteracts or *negates* the eroticism of the dancer's image, it certainly does transform the specular relation between the viewer and the erotic female body. Perhaps the key to the semi-nude dancer is her inaccessibility: her alluring performance is appreciable, but triply distanced from us—first by the separation of the screen, secondly by the fact that she recedes into the background, and thirdly by the interposed sections of the mirror that partition her body. Instead, Suzuki's film emphasises the kind of fetishism associated with extreme distance and the spectacular, theatrical deployment of light, colour, costume. It positions the eroticized body as a (literally) small portion of a larger composition, and moreover a composition which emphasises not one unified effect, but in fact partitions the frame to create extreme visual contrasts.

<sup>44</sup> This aesthetic of the female body 'dissected' by a montage of partial views was notable in influential French *nouvelle vague* films such as *Et Dieu...Créa la Femme/And God...Created Woman* (Roger Vadim, 1956) and Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1962). Its ideological effects have been critically appraised, notably by Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge 1993), pp. 180-191.



4:19 Extreme Visual Contrasts (1): Shallowness and Depth (the small HQ is represented in multi-planar depth while the large, deep cabaret space appears flattened and two-dimensional)



4:20 Extreme Visual Contrasts (2): The Bisected Frame: contrast the 'decadent' mise-en-scène of the cabaret with the sterile office

The emphasis is on the heterogeneous composition, the variegated spectacle of multiple attractions taken as a whole, rather than extracting the erotic body from out of it.

How are we to understand these choices? By refusing to short-circuit the viewer's awareness of the camera's mediation of the erotic image (which is doubled by the mediation of the mirror-screen), Suzuki reminds us that *all* cinematic eroticism lacks

a third dimension; it is mediated by the presence of a flat screen. In this sense the mirror corresponds to the theme of the mediated sounds and voices of information technology, but there is a larger cinematic reflection at work. Suzuki seems to insist that the eroticism of the cinematic body is different in kind and quality than eroticism-in-the-world, and not simply a second-hand or illegitimate reflection.

The mirror scene therefore allegorizes but does not quite clarify the director's sexual politics of the image. Certainly it clarifies that these politics are determined by Suzuki's general sense of what cinema is. What the mirror scene witnesses is an opening out, perhaps a bold declaration, of a self-reflexive tendency which had its roots in his earlier hard-boiled films. Reflexive aesthetics have often been polemically opposed to realism, i.e. to conventional practices of a 'realist' aesthetic at certain periods in art history,<sup>45</sup> and this certainly seems to be the case with *Yajū no seishun* and its relation to the conventional or 'consensual' realism of studio cinema. Certainly, this disharmonious spectacle is a spectacle of 'interruption' in a way that Robert Stam has characterized as fundamental to the reflexive art of the modernist avant-garde: 'Benjamin compares the alienation effect of the epic theatre to the sudden freezing of a domestic quarrel when a stranger enters the room...The interruption has made the condition strange.' In this way, Mizuno's obnoxious behaviour and the dancer's routine are 'estranged' on the other side of the mirror-screen. Stam adds that 'with the advent of modernism, discontinuity becomes programmatic and rather aggressive. Interruption pre-empts spectacle; in fact it *becomes* the spectacle.' The interrupting force of the mirror-screen defines and indeed 'becomes' the spectacle. Its mediating presence, coupled with the rejection of 'directness' and 'proximity' to the (erotic) object of view, places the viewer in a unique position to appreciate that all cinematic representation is indirect. If the realist image of the classical studio cinema is

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 13-15.

essentially a disavowal of that fact, as I believe it is, then Suzuki's film, by its calculated difference, negates both the myth and the political valence of 'direct' photographic representation.

By 1963, a challenge to the conventions of realist melodrama was already well under way through the more Brechtian cinema of Ōshima Nagisa. Suzuki's allegory of the mirror offers more than simply a challenge to realism: it amounts, in fact, to a meditation on signification, or symbolic presentation, itself. Speaking to Isoda and Todoroki, Suzuki vehemently denied attempting to put forward a message, or convey a fixed meaning via the device of the mirror-screen:

SUZUKI: But what about a generally boring storyline? It's boring, so one tries to revise it—because Nikkatsu films were easy to understand. So, with an ordinary cabaret, I'm thinking 'What should we do here?'...and [because of my] crossing through the mirror, everyone thinks, 'Wasn't there some meaning in doing this?', *and that isn't right*....if one says... 'How about this?', *it's not a matter of trying to say something*.

ISODA/TODOROKI: Now, on the contrary, in that portion [of the film] everyone is uncertain.

SUZUKI: Yes...

ISODA/TODOROKI: [It] is richly fruitful...fit for appreciation any number of times.<sup>46</sup>

Suzuki claims that he decides on his camera set-ups (and therefore many of his expressive effects) on the morning of the shoot, then immediately puts them into practice.<sup>47</sup> He claims not to make fixed decisions about colour and mise-en-scène, but relies on the input of his expert crew (in this case Nagatsuka and designer Yoshinaga Yokō) during production.<sup>48</sup> He does not intend to get across a specific point, only to see what sort of truth may be uncovered. Although we do not have to take everything that Suzuki says at face value, it is important to reflect on what is at least his *ideal* methodology. The cinema gives both textual detail and an intellectual life to the director's intuition (a rough mental image, so to speak), the semantic 'content' of which (its precise meaning and significance) he vehemently denies exists in his mind

<sup>46</sup> in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 170. Emphasis mine.

<sup>47</sup> Interview in Mark Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008), p. 99

<sup>48</sup> in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 168.

before the shoot is accomplished. Suzuki never knows exactly what he will end up with; and in fact, the time and budget constraints of B-movie filmmaking, under which Suzuki's aesthetic was formed, gives credence to this method, since they ordain that what his team ends up with cannot be altered fundamentally (even in editing, for there is little or no coverage).

Suzuki's denial of a message may be a more revealing approach to the allegory of the mirror than any other. In an irrational and loosely surrealist approach,<sup>49</sup> he seems to use the limitations of filmmaking in order to *prevent* himself from creating a consciously interpreted image, i.e. an image which provides its viewer with the means to make a conclusive interpretation of it. Could it be that such images, in addition to being deliberately evasive, embody a certain fear or horror of interpretation? Could they be an attack on meaning itself, that is, an attack on cinema as vehicle of meaning?

Therefore, while I have described Suzuki's reflexive image practice as 'allegorical,' the term should be used with reservation. It is allegorical insofar as the director invites us to consider the *significance* of what he has filmed, rather than simply to accept its existence as a matter of phenomenology. It is a cinema not of observation, but of intellectual relation.<sup>50</sup> But in its standard connotation, allegory is an *explicit* 'conventional and rational'<sup>51</sup> correlation between something textual (or filmic) and something extra-textual that is determinate and clearly recognizable 'within a particular culture'.<sup>52</sup> But the Suzuki image attracts associations which do not

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<sup>49</sup> in Schilling, p. 102.

<sup>50</sup> See Tom Gunning's discussion of Lang's use of cinematic allegory as opposed to both naturalism and psychological characterization. Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, (London: BFI, 2001), pp. 26-30.

<sup>51</sup> Gunning, p. 55

<sup>52</sup> M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), p. 311. Abrams calls allegory an 'obvious' (p. 311) secondary order of signification added to a primary or literal level of signification (p. 5) and distinguishes two types: (1) historical and political, in which 'characters and actions...represent historical personages and events' and (2) the allegory of ideas in which 'characters represent concepts...and plots...an abstract thesis or doctrine' (p. 5). Note how in both cases these are unambiguous relations of equivalency (A=B) between the textual (i.e. the character) and a second thing (i.e. 'greed' or 'Malthus' theory of population') which is readily identifiable within a particular culture (no matter how abstract the concept may be in itself). This 'relatively

have a clear pre-existent source or ground; although the images created by his team naturally stem from their given cultural experiences, beliefs, and ideas, Suzuki aims to present this authorial 'cultural baggage' as an undiscrète and undifferentiated tissue which can be rolled out indefinitely, revealing new threads as it goes. His images do not lead us to one set of sources or only in one direction. The mirror-screen is one of Suzuki's grand symbols, or, to propose a slightly more specific nomenclature, a grand *open metaphor*. We may contrast such metaphor with a clear, direct or 'closed' visual figure like the dancer resembling a flower (Figure 4.16). Suzuki utilizes such direct metaphors (necessarily) but does not rest with them: he shifts the focus to the contiguity of the dancer-flower with the mirror-screen, the décor, the foreground action, etc., all within the same frame. Within the realm of linguistic or visual figuration, the operative distinction here may be between metaphors which Philip Wheelwright has described as *epiphoric*, 'to describe the synthesis brought about by similarity,' and those he has called *diaphoric* to describe 'the synthesis arriving from the juxtaposition of disparate elements.'<sup>53</sup> For Trevor Whittock, diaphoric visual relations in cinema are basic to the structure of metonymy (i.e. visual contiguity) within or between shots.<sup>54</sup> Just as the variegated spectacle absorbs the dancer into multiple centres of visual interest, creating a potentially infinite number of associations, the mirror-screen in itself—yet like all mirrors necessary conditioned by what it shows/reflects—is a privileged metaphor which holds out multiple conceptual possibilities for the viewer: it is polysemic on the level of its cognitive interpretation.

At the same time, if the mirror is an open metaphor, it is also a reflexive one: like most of Suzuki's visual gestures, it leads back to the cinema or, at least, Suzuki's sense

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determinate reference' (p. 312) of an allegorical correlation makes it unlike the 'further range of suggested but unspecified reference' (p. 312) of the symbolic.

<sup>53</sup> in Trevor Whittock, *Metaphor and Film* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Whittock, pp. 9-11, 59-61. Whittock expresses the *epiphoric* metaphor of direct comparison as  $A+B=A(B)$ —the original idea modified by its relation to something else—and diaphoric relations as  $A+B=Z$ —an entirely new synthetic notion. But since, as Whittock recognizes, diaphoric relations build on constituent metaphors (like the dancer-flower), we might express Suzuki's combinatory metaphoric tapestries as  $(AB) + (CD)=D-Z$ —that is, contiguous combinations of metaphors setting off multiple new conceptual syntheses.

of it. In this sense, Suzuki is the quintessential self-reflexive artist. As Ricoeur defines it, 'Reflexion is the act of turning back upon itself by which a subject grasps in a moment of intellectual clarity and moral responsibility, the unifying principle of the operations among which it is dispersed and forgets itself as a subject.'<sup>55</sup> To relate this definition to an artistic practice, then, Suzuki turns the cinema back upon itself (the mirror-screen), not only to reveal its forgotten operations (for example, the role of mediation), but to use those revelations to define and defend a particular authorial practice at the very same moment at which that practice is constituted.

But the question remains: how do we 'read' a reflexive discourse about the cinema within an evasive image practice dedicated (as Suzuki would have it) to scepticism, to the negation of objective meaning relations? One must remember that the mirror-screen is polysemic precisely because it does *not*, like the dancer-flower, call up an instantly recognizable simile in the viewer's mind. New conceptual associations must be forged. We might consider the reflexive cinematic associations that arise as just some of the many ripples caused by the splash of this image-creation, yet upon which we see a distorted reflection of that creation. Suzuki negates one kind of meaning often found in art (a familiar visual figure such as 'simile', a familiar allegorical interpretation of narrative like 'a message') in order that metaphorical associations and potentialities may proliferate in all directions.

We may reconsider the 'allegory' of the mirror-screen, then, by asking, what associations does it bring to mind, and what associations does it not, that is, what may it be thought to negate? Firstly, and most obviously, the one-way mirror is closer to a cinema screen than to a standard mirror: an audience is on one side and the object of spectacle is on the other, unconscious of the voyeur but acting *as-if-to-be-seen* nonetheless. On the viewing side, the gangsters watch Mizuno and the cabaret in

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<sup>55</sup> in Stam, *Reflexivity in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia, 1992), p. xiv.

silence. Since the purpose of the mirror is to provide information, why not include dialogue and reaction? The silence recalls that of the cinematic audience, but further, it is also a refusal of communication, hence, of interpretation. The image is viewed but not articulated into discourse. Its significance remains an open question, and this is doubly emphasised by the silence of the cabaret beyond the mirror: it will not speak for itself. What we were once privy to, via the synchronized image and sound of the classical cinema, now becomes inaccessible, like the dancer in the distance; and in fact the image acquires new qualities and relations on account of its 'muteness.' If Suzuki is therefore evasive of interpretation, this evasive practice is inextricably linked to the negation of the conventional—the Nikkatsu cinema which Suzuki found too easy to understand—and in this sense too the denial of 'the message' and the allegory of a differential practice are related. This has aesthetic and political consequences which shall become more defined in the mature films that follow.

One such consequence is the question of who controls the voyeuristic image. The dancer appears in the dark, from below the screen, resembling the cinema in which the image of desire appears mysteriously out of nothing, at the turn of the switch, in the hands of the manipulators of media. It may appear that the gangsters, the unseen observers, are the controllers of the image. But like the audience, they struggle to decipher the meaning of the image. Who is this unknown man who has appeared on the screen? They recognize behaviour, they make out cause and effect, but they can neither discern the motive and purpose of the stranger, nor can they place his action in an explanatory (narrative) context. On another level, though, the gangsters are in thrall to the image despite their active cognition. These are images of desire both for men (the dancer) and women (Mizuno himself, the object of Mrs. Nomoto's gaze). Suzuki's images are neither ascetic nor prurient: they do not deny cinematic pleasure, in fact channel it in certain directions; but they also recognize the potential for



manipulation by the powerful. What Suzuki seems to negate is the uni-directionality of the pleasure-image, the way in which a *mise-en-scène* manipulates pleasure rather than allowing it to operate freely, to rove over a broad canvas of varied attractions. At this point the modernist dichotomy 'that rejects naturalism in favor of reflexive, hyper-fabulatory or carnivalesque strategies' reappears.<sup>56</sup> In this early manifesto, Suzuki upholds the pleasures of spectatorship but subverts its directional manipulation, either opening it out onto a collage-like and carnivalesque *mise-en-scène* (captured in heterodox widescreen rather than close-up) or simply asserting, through his female characters, the reversibility of the gaze.

It is fitting that, in *Yajū no seishun*, Suzuki's grand metaphor of the cinema remains a diegetic metaphor (the one-way mirror), rather than the non-diegetic effects which would determine his signature in subsequent films. This reminds us that it is by and large a classical film. The film is not as formally disruptive as subsequent efforts, while its potentially progressive ideological thrust is in thrall to Suzuki's emerging doctrine of the inherent ambiguity and polysemy of the visual. Deleuze would have called it a cinema of *mental* or *intellectual* relations at the boundaries of classical form: situation and action are no longer clearly or causally linked (e.g. why do Hitchcock's *Birds* attack?), and must be related through a third term (for example, Suzuki's mirror-screen).<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, this development of a self-reflexive cinematic signification not only momentarily shatters the limits of classical form, but amounts to a differential cinematic practice put forward, with increasing sophistication, as a political imperative, a response to the times.

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<sup>56</sup> Stam, p. xiv.

<sup>57</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 199-204.

## CHAPTER FIVE: BOUNDARY CASES: THE YAKUZA SEQUENCE (1963-1965)

What I have called the ‘Yakuza Sequence,’ comprising *Kantō mushuku/Kantō Wanderer* (1963), *Hana to dotō/Flowers and Angry Waves*, *Oretachi no chi ga yurusanai/Our Blood Will Not Forgive* (1963) and *Irezumi ichidai/One Generation of Tattooes* (1965), was not made consecutively, but regularly alternated with Suzuki’s ‘Flesh Trilogy’ (Chapter Six). All four films involve a *yakuza* or ex-*yakuza* hero (in many ways the same character played by Kobayashi Akira, with Takahashi Hideki taking the role for the final film). *Hana to dotō* and *Irezumi ichidai* are period dramas of the early Taishō and Shōwa eras, respectively. *Kantō mushuku*, though a contemporary fiction set in 1963, reaches back into Japan’s historical imaginary and initiates a discourse on the continuities of (anti-)social ideology that runs through the subsequent films. The four films also establish a pattern of self-conscious invention and *intervention* in conventional structures of cinema narration: essentially, the formation of ‘The Suzuki Difference’. In this chapter, for purposes of brevity, I will pass over *Oretachi no chi ga yurusanai* (featuring Kobayashi and Takahashi together), for though it belongs to this sequence in its subject matter and stylistic economy, its narrative is a half-formed precursor to the ‘Violence Trilogy’. Part One of this chapter, therefore, focuses on *Kantō mushuku*, while Part Two concentrates on the period films.

## I. KANTŌ MUSHUKU: DREAMS AND REVERSALS

### *Yakuza, ninkyō, and nagaremono*

‘*Kantō Wanderer* is a straight *yakuza* film and nothing more....The fact that I made it is a little strange. Because there are plenty of good *yakuza* films....Why is *Kanto Wanderer* being shown tonight, rather than [Sawashima Tadashi’s] *Three Wandering Yakuza*?’<sup>1</sup>

When Suzuki said this, he was at his most evasive and strategically modest. But there is also a recognizable truth to what he says. The four *yakuza* films are, in certain ways, the most conventional of Suzuki’s pictures after 1962. They generally operate according to the traditional strengths of classical narrative film under the studio system: engaging, suspenseful plots; romantic melodramas of love and loss; identification and empathy with the protagonists. Particularly in regards to the male hero, the films closely resemble Tōei studios’ so-called *ninkyō eiga* (chivalrous film), the most popular form of the *yakuza* picture from the mid-1960s. This far more ‘nativist’ genre would come to dominate the film industry with over 300 films made before the decade was out.<sup>2</sup> It was no accident that Suzuki’s rise to prominence as a genre *auteur* coincided with the beginnings of a mega-genre still in the process of assimilating various influences. Film critics compared Suzuki to a master of the Tōei genre, Katō Tai.<sup>3</sup>

Isolde Standish and Keiko McDonald have offered detailed commentaries on the structure and ideology of Tōei’s *ninkyō* films.<sup>4</sup> The latter emphasises the pre-

<sup>1</sup> in Tony Rayns, ed., ‘Suzuki on Suzuki,’ in Simon Field and Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill* (London: ICA, 1994), p. 26. Sawashima’s *Matabi san-nin yakuza* was made for Tōei in 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Joaquin da Silva, ‘Fukasaku and Scorsese: Yakuza and Gangsters’ in Alain Silver and James Ursini, eds., *Gangster Film Reader* (New York: Limelight, 2007), p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> Iijima Tetsuo, ‘Katō Tai to Suzuki Seijun: insaido de wa hanasakanu ninin no Taishō senchūha (Katō Tai and Suzuki Seijun: On the Inside, Two Men of the Taishō War Generation Who Did not Bloom), *Eiga Geijutsu* (March 1967), pp. 36-38; Yoshio Shirai and Iijima Tetsuo, *Nihon eiga no ransei ‘itanji’* (The *Enfants Terribles* of Japanese Cinema’s Troubled Times), *Kinema junpō* no. 440 (June 1967), pp. 41-46. Katō (1916-1985) was the major director of the *Hibotan bakuto/Red Peony Gambler* series (1968-1972) and other popular *yakuza* films.

<sup>4</sup> McDonald ‘The *Yakuza* Film: An Introduction,’ in Arthur Nalletti Jr. and David Desser, eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 185-193; Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* (Richmond: Surrey: Curzon, 2000), pp. 158-181.

modern ideological structure of *giri* and *ninjō* (the conflict and/or balance between ‘duty’ and ‘personal feeling’). The *ninkyō* protagonist is always a sympathetic yakuza who commands the empathy and, arguably, the ideological consensus of the audience through the charisma and sexual glamour of stars such as Takakura Ken. Paul Schrader notes that even in his youth, Takakura represented ‘everything that is old, strong, and virtuous in Japan, and stands as a symbol against Westernization and compromise. As such he is revered by student radicals, the far right, and the... guilt-ridden sections of the middle class.’<sup>5</sup> Takakura constructed a highly successful ego ideal and fantasy of self-reliance for a male audience. As McDonald has shown, the principled hero provides a clear moral contrast to an array of greedy and villainous gang rivals. When he breaks into a killing spree at the end of each film, a combination of narrative manipulation (usually involving revenge), the vicarious thrill of cinematic violence, and the likeability of the protagonist serve to justify the use of ‘righteous’ or honorific violence which defines the *ninkyō* hero.<sup>6</sup> Japanese studios (including Nikkatsu in its own attempts to imitate the Tōei formula) whitewashed and aggrandised this criminal subset of Japanese society, despite its many ties to the ‘legitimate’ power structures of business and politics, including the then highly unpopular Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, who resigned in 1960.<sup>7</sup> In these films, often financially backed by the *yakuza* themselves,<sup>8</sup> gangsters appear as the inheritor of the samurai tradition, as a comforting agent of pre-war cultural continuity, and as the exemplar of an idealised Japanese masculinity. This ideal was predicated, as

<sup>5</sup> Schrader, ‘The Yakuza Film: A Primer,’ in Silver and Ursini, eds., *Gangster Film Reader*, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> McDonald ‘The Yakuza Film: An Introduction’, pp. 174-179.

<sup>7</sup> David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro, *The Yakuza: Japan’s Criminal Underworld*, second edition (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003), p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> These are, of course, legally unsubstantiated allegations, but for the testimony of insiders such as Fukasaku Kinji, see Federico Varese, ‘The Secret History of Japanese Cinema: Yakuza Movies’, *Global Crime* 7:1 (February 2006), pp. 117.

Isolde Standish has explained, on the representation of physical superiority, homosocial bonding, and self-sacrificing stoicism.<sup>9</sup>

In some ways this masculine ideal was continuous with pre-war film culture, for example *chanbara* films like *Chūji no tabi nikki/Chūji's Travel Diary* (Itō, 1927). Like these films, the *ninkyō eiga* often posited the gambler hero as a *nagaremono*, a wanderer or drifter,<sup>10</sup> even despite the binding paternalistic ties of the *yakuza* gang structure evident in such formulaic scenes as the gang meeting in formal dress and the breaking of the sake cup. It is no accident, therefore, that most of Tōei's *ninkyō eiga* were period dramas while speaking, allegorically, to the culture of the 1960s. But as Suzuki pointed out satirically, the rule-bound *yakuza* 'drifter' is even less of an 'outlaw' than the heroine of melodrama, who in her forbidden emotions is often *truly* forced outside of society.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, if the *nagaremono* ideal was a distant, mythic posture for Tōei's period pictures, in *yakuza* films with contemporary settings, it was a total anachronism. In both cases it was also something of an ideological convenience: it allowed the hero to operate according to a strict, binding code emanating from society while taking on the appearance of a rebel outside society. This explains the immense popularity of *ninkyō yakuza* films even amongst leftist students of the 1960s, as Satō Tadao noted.<sup>12</sup> Like the oppressed *sarariman*, students were able to indulge in fantasies of rebellion through these stylized films, even while facing down the real *yakuza* across the picket lines of the Miike coal strike (1959) and other major sites of political struggle. With hindsight, though, we can see that it is the

<sup>9</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 160-162, 170, 172-175.

<sup>10</sup> Certain comic directors such as Yamanaka Sadao were noted for using such 'anti-heroes' as a vehicle for provocative social criticism. cf. Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (Kodansha, 1983), pp. 222-3; Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), pp. 66-73.

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki, 'The Days of *Kantō mushuku*,' in Seijun Suzuki and Shigehiko Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem=Suzuki Seijun: the Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Satō, *Current in Japanese Cinema*, pp. 52-53; cf. Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema* (New York: Continuum: 2005), p. 309

righteous, empathetic cinematic hero who sustains the fantasy of the ‘chivalrous’ gangster and reifies the gangster’s very existence, even when the narrative opposes him to degraded, corrupt or capitalist bosses who betray the reality of the system. Similarly, as Standish has shown in reference to the popular *Abashiri bangaichi/Abashiri Prison* (1965-1967) series at Tōei, even when Takakura Ken’s *nagaremono* is placed at the furthest possible removal from ‘polite’ society—the notorious Abashiri Prison—he still occupies a place in an idealised but rigid patriarchal gang structure within the prison.<sup>13</sup> Again, with hindsight, there is very little reason to equate the yakuza hero with social subversion.

In Suzuki’s *yakuza* films, as a few critics noticed, it is this very failure of rebellion and independence that seems to fascinate the director, whereas in *ninkyō eiga*, as Standish argues, it is conversely the *nagaremono*’s failure to sustain a homosocial ‘connectedness’ that generates pathos.<sup>14</sup> Yamaguchi Tetsu in *Eiga hyōron* cleverly used the motif of the *yakuza* tattoo when he wrote of Suzuki’s films that ‘this is the fate of the rebel, to wipe and wipe and be unable to wipe it off.’ Further, he argued that ‘the essence of Suzuki is *wandering* and *treachery*.’<sup>15</sup> Since the *nagaremono* was a popular fictional icon across studios, and since the hero of *Kantō mushuku*, as Suzuki insisted, was not much of an outcast, we must take this with a grain of salt; nevertheless, Yamaguchi made an intriguing point. One only has to recall the ambivalence and hypocrisy of Mizuno’s position in *Yajū no seishun* as a vigilante/policemen in order to understand Suzuki’s interest in the *nagaremono* motif and the *yakuza* genre at this stage of development. Suzuki is fascinated by the boundary case.

<sup>13</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 167-169; *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 256-259.

<sup>14</sup> Standish, p. 316.

<sup>15</sup> Yamaguchi, ‘*Wakakihi no Suzuki no shōzō*,’ (Portrait of Seijun’s Youth), *Eiga hyōron* (Feb. 1967) in Motomura Shūji, ed., *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001), p. 131.

Nevertheless, we must be cautious of retro-actively reading the ideology of Suzuki's *yakuza* sequence in the light of the later *ninkyō eiga* formula. Although that genre had a long line of precedents, it was not yet established by 1963, with one of the earliest recognizable iterations of the formula, *Hishakaku: Jinsei gekijō/Hishakaku: Theater of Life* (1963) appearing just contemporaneously with *Kantō mushuku*. Suzuki, once again in the vanguard of popular genre, had no set form either to follow or negate, but only his own sense of genre and its characteristic discourses of masculinity and post-war identity—which might amount to a road not taken.

Therefore, if the masculine ideal of the *nagaremono* appears to permeate *Kantō mushuku* as it permeates the *ninkyō eiga*, I do not use the word 'appears' lightly. On the one hand, it is important to understand the ideological and other limitations imposed on a Nikkatsu contract director. Suzuki testified later that he had a problem with *ninkyō* ideology,<sup>16</sup> but that he was constrained by Nikkatsu scripts which were conceived and handed down by an executive committee.<sup>17</sup> *Kantō mushuku*'s script is in fact distantly based on what would have been, for Suzuki, an unimpeachable source: the serialised novel *Chitei no Uta/Song of the Underworld* (1953) by Hirabayashi Taiko.<sup>18</sup> Suzuki's immediate source, however, was the successful 1956 version of *Chitei no uta* by his mentor Noguchi (with Suzuki as assistant).

Nevertheless, the 'limitations' on a contract director extended far beyond the choice of source material to Nikkatsu's enforcement of conventional structures of plot, melodrama, and secondary identification, all of which had been studiously obeyed by Noguchi's classical and realist version. Despite all this, there are significant formal

<sup>16</sup> in Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie-Book* (Berkeley: Stonebridge Press, 2003), p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Rayns in Field and Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> In youth, Hirabayashi (1905-1972) was a member of the Taishō proletarian literary movement and was arrested for sedition, along with hundreds of other cultural figures, in 1923. During and after the war she received several literary prizes.

and narrative elements in Suzuki's three films which depart from, and even contradict what would become the dominant ideology of the *ninkyō eiga*. In this sense, Suzuki's earlier statement about *Kantō mushuku* is utterly evasive.

There is a 'meandering' quality to the narrative of *Kantō mushuku* that results in a 'meandering' of the film's ideological thrust: by the end of the film, things are not so simple as in the *ninkyō eiga*, which depends on the honorific predictability of the main character. Where the Tōei films avoid reference to the post-war corporatism, election fraud, prostitution, and strike-breaking activities of the *yakuza*, *Kantō mushuku* gleefully insists upon them. If, however, as argued above, it is the hero rather than his corrupt environment who reifies the ideals that the *yakuza* are supposed to uphold, then it is only through the hero, and/or the ideal itself, that the dominant ideology can be questioned. This is precisely the achievement of *Kantō mushuku*.

It is crucial to note that such ideological reversals are achieved, as if *covertly*, through formal strategies of distantiation that subject heroic melodrama to an ironic, often purely visual, authorial commentary. Suzuki's mature stylistic preoccupations are consistently in evidence here, suggesting aberrant readings even while in tension with a linear melodrama that offers conventional ones. At this stage, the 'Suzuki Difference' is only a partial 'threat' to the coherence of the studio film. But Suzuki forces cracks in the armour of classical film style, and this in turn outlines the cracks in that armour of ideology that genre, as many theorists believe, was meant to shore up.

Stylistically, *Kantō mushuku* was like no other film made up to that time by the post-war studios. Its closest formal relative is perhaps Ōshima's *Nihon no yoru to kiri/Night and Fog in Japan* (1960), which had created an experimental political



iconography through non-diegetic colour and moving camera sequence shots. But Suzuki's ambitious editing practices, and his insistence on location shooting to capture Tokyo's urban environment as an allegory of the times, operated within a far less restricted set of stylistic parameters. The aesthetic newness of *Kantō mushuku* may be found in its narrative emphasis on dream and vision, presented with non-diegetic formal effects and representing the collective, largely masculine social fantasy of empowerment through seduction and violence. Equally important, however, is the startling use of non-diegetic colour and lighting and discontinuity editing. These qualities—oneiric narrative, colour/lighting, and discontinuity, are the foci of the analytical sections below.

#### *Wandering Narrative, Wandering Heroism*

If much of the narrative of *Kantō mushuku* is linear in a strictly temporal sense, it does not develop in the straightforward manner of the classical studio film. Refusing to follow its protagonist throughout the first third of the film, the narrative literally wanders through multiple plots and protagonists towards an anti-climax. The film begins with school girl Tokiko (Matsubara Chieko) and her crush on the strait-laced *yakuza* hero, Katsuta (Kobayashi Akira). This romantic situation is soon sidelined and disappears entirely (along with Tokiko) in the second half of the film. After one scene which introduces, as per the *yakuza* formula, the internecine gang conflict that causes problems for Katsuta, the film turns to a seemingly unrelated subplot involving the exploitation of Tokiko's school friend, Hanako, by a *yakuza* punk. In the second third of the film, a further subplot intervenes as Katsuta meets an old love interest, the female card sharp Mrs. Iwata (Itō Hiroko). Conflict develops between Katsuta and Mrs. Iwata's gambler husband, with Mrs. Iwata increasingly prominent

as the melodramatic protagonist. In the final thirty minutes, this in turn is replaced by a new conflict involving Katsuta's new job and his intransigent boss.

There are aspects of the plot that remain completely incomprehensible (what is the off-screen relationship between Oyama the businessman, Yoshida the *oyabun*, and Okaru-Hachi the con artist?). Perhaps most importantly, the climactic violence that dominates the ending of the film proves not to be a 'climax' per se, for it does not resolve any of the conflicts that the narrative has presented to us: it is only a climax of energy and character psychology. This is an essential point: the violence that provides a resolution in the *ninkyō* film is here used to call into question both a formulaic structure, and, most importantly, the formulaic masculine hero. In this scene, Katsuta has taken a second job as a dealer to support his worthless, cash-strapped Boss Izu (Tonoyama Taiji). Seething from these tensions, Katsuta slaughters two low level, drunken gamblers who disrupt the game in order to borrow money. This is clearly a murderous release of pent-up erotic and Oedipal frustration: the real targets of Katsuta's rage should have been the arrogant husband of Mrs. Iwata and his own corrupt father-figure Izu. During a previous conversation with the latter, Suzuki inserts a totally unconventional gesture, a non-diegetic red line which moves randomly over Katsuta's countenance, possibly as a symbol of suppressed rage.



5:1 The Red Thread of Attachment: a non-diegetic red line, like a brush stroke, moves across the wide screen (and Katsuta's angry countenance)

This sort of visualization is our only access to Katsuta's thoughts; even more so than in *Yajū no seishun*, symbolic effects 'tell us' what the script does not; but such visibility renders all events as matters of interpretation rather than causality. This is true of much of the film's memorable colour stylization: it may express a psychological transition in the characters, but its nature and significance is unclear. Suzuki has often expressed that certain colours have a particular emotional resonance (i.e. purple=anxiety).<sup>19</sup> But contrary to Satō's interpretation (Chapter One) that these colour effects were essentially related to character empathy,<sup>20</sup> Suzuki had already rejected the subordination of style to empathetic identification: 'One must not drag the audience....In my way of seeing...I've gone for empathy completely or not at all.'<sup>21</sup> The relational uncertainty between character and non-diegetic colour replaces the manipulated emotions of the *yakuza* genre's 'structure of judgment.'

<sup>19</sup> Rayns, ed., 'Suzuki on Suzuki,' in Field and Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (1983), p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> Suzuki, *Kenke erejii*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed., (Tokyo: Nihon tosho senta: 2003), pp. 128-9.



5:2 Colour as Emotion and/or Colour as Ambiguity: non-diegetic yellow flairs on the window behind the suffering Mrs. Iwata: is it the misfortune of romantic attachment, or its loss, or neither?

Alexander Jacoby writes that ‘*Kanto Wanderer* was a subtly subversive commentary on the obsolescence of the *yakuza* code: here, the protagonist’s efforts to act honourably fail to avert bloodshed and, indeed, trigger the death of his own patron.’<sup>22</sup> Katsuta bullies the rival boss Yoshida (Tōru Abe) into respecting the authority of Boss Izu. But in the next scene, once Katsuta is safely in jail, Yoshida does the exact opposite and assassinates Izu. Katsuta’s code of violence resolves nothing, including the narrative of the film. Is it the case that the ideal itself cannot stand, or is the post-war hero simply incapable of embodying it? Suzuki says of his main character, ‘Kobayashi plays an *oyabun* [gang boss] to be, radiating self-confidence, smugly striding along the broad path of crime....An increasingly proud criminal: one who could only flourish within the Japanese system. In other words: as an outlaw, he’s a bit too much.’<sup>23</sup> This suggests a satirical attitude towards Katsuta’s old-fashioned, ‘smug’ ideological certainty. Out of step with society, Katsuta’s ‘honorific’ behaviour spells disaster not simply for himself—for this alone would

<sup>22</sup> Jacoby, *A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors: From the Silent Era to the Present Day* (Berkeley: Stonebridge Press, 2008), p. 289.

<sup>23</sup> Suzuki, ‘The Days of *Kantō mushuku*’, in Suzuki and Hasumi, p. 39.

reinforce the ‘tragic hero’ motif, the positive sense of self-sacrifice that permeates the *ninkyō eiga*—but for everyone around him, and particularly the innocent. When Katsuta’s brutish gang brother (a purely bestial character, like *Yajū no seishun*’s Minami) has ‘sold’ the schoolgirl Hanako into sexual slavery, Katsuta resolves to buy her freedom. In a fit of egoism and jealousy, however, Katsuta blows the money away in a gambling contest with Mrs. Iwata’s husband. So much for poor Hanako. For a while, everything (including the *yakuza* ‘code’) is sacrificed to Kobayashi’s sexual obsession; but in the violent anti-climax, he reverses course in what he calls a ‘last chance for the Izu clan’s name.’

Because Kobayashi is an attractive protagonist whom the audience, no doubt, will readily forgive for all his sins, Suzuki does not unambiguously demystify the *yakuza* and its ideal masculinity. But Katsuta is a half-formed prototype for the simply delusional and dangerous characters who dominate the second half of Suzuki’s career. The only ‘resolution’ that *Kantō mushuku* offers is the entrapment that each character has brought upon his or her self. It is as if Suzuki wanted to emphasise the role of chance (various meetings and coincidences) or social determination (the economic decline and capitalist conversion of the old *yakuza* gangs) over the strength of will, stoic perseverance, and force of tradition that underpins the myth of *jingi* (the *yakuza* code of morality) in the cinema.

Wandering through and between all these threads of narrative is the character of Hanako, a precocious, flirtatious high school girl fascinated with *yakuza* (read: power). She serves as a counterpoint to Katsuta’s masculinity. Initially bartered and sexually exploited by a *chinpira* (punk) and a businessmen in a harrowing scene in the country, she ends up as a geisha to the *yakuza* bosses and, indeed, as a kind of power-broker. Hanako’s natural talent for manipulating men through sex (or rather,

the promise of sex) gives the lie to the pre-war myth of idealized masculinity that is enshrined in the *yakuza* subculture and predicated on the subjugation of the feminine. The other female characters, such as Mrs. Iwata who is trapped in this culture because of family attachment, are harshly treated by the patriarchal structure. Hanako becomes its master. Suzuki lavishes attention on this character: she is the first of a line of ‘masterful’ women in Suzuki’s films, for instance Misako in *Koroshi no rakuin*, whose extremity brooks no concession to patriarchy. At the same time, she is a ‘dangerously’ free and frivolous comic woman, like the clownish O-Roku of *Nikutai no mon*. She is also one of Suzuki’s first recognizably nihilistic heroes. The *yakuza* are sensual or sadistic thugs, but the perpetually smiling Hanako, like Shakespeare’s Edmund or Odysseus, ‘says nothing that [s]he believes, and believes nothing that [s]he says.’<sup>24</sup> Again like Iago, Hanako is self-delighted by her growing talent for controlling the inferior.<sup>25</sup> At the end, she casually dumps her boyfriend Fuyu after he has killed her new lover, Boss Izu. The culture of the *yakuza* has created its own scourge. No Suzuki film is thus more conscious of the collision between reactionary cultural nostalgia and the awakening of female self-discovery in the 1960s. In this manner, Suzuki both respects and updates what was differential about his source material, namely, Hirabayashi’s focus on trapped (and not so trapped) women within the *yakuza* sub-culture; for in reality such women often suffered the kind of abuse that Hanako, in fiction, will turn on its head.

### *Dream and Reverie*

*Kantō mushuku* is Suzuki’s first major exploration of dream and mental vision in the cinema, a subject that I shall explore in more detail in Chapter Nine. Long

<sup>24</sup> Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, (New York: Harcourt, 1998), p. 340.

<sup>25</sup> Bloom, pp. 336, 361-2.

before Kurosawa, Suzuki used bold, non-diegetic primary colours and ‘colour expressionist’ lighting effects to create a cinematic ‘dreamscape’ in the midst of a standard narrative. Since these techniques were so unconventional in 1963, the disoriented viewer enjoys no clear demarcation, in the manner of ‘the Hollywood flashback’, between the diegetic space of the narrative and the space of dream.

When Katsuta enters the home of his bewitching love interest, Mrs. Iwata, an important flashback occurs that tells how the characters first met in a dark, wintry *ryōkan* (a symbolic locus of violence between the sexes). Later, we find the characters sitting together in the tatami room, silently recalling their acquaintance. This long-held shot is a tour-de-force of expressive non-diegetic lighting. The key light fades out completely, leaving an artificial pale blue light which supposedly comes from a window on the upper screen right. It shines on the entrance to Mrs Iwata’s garden in the background of the shot, and a pale reflection of this blue light is cast on the profiles of the two actors:



5:3 Shot (1a): Haunted Remembrances: artificial pale blue light outlines the characters as they reminisce

The blue light then fades, leaving the background in darkness, but a new, more delicate lighting scheme re-illuminates the actors in the foreground.



5:4 Shot (1b): The blue light fades but the actors are re-illuminated from the right before the lights fade again as Katsuta, without warning, violently 'seduces' Mrs. Iwata and pulls her under the camera

Katsuta suddenly grabs hold of Mrs. Iwata and pulls her to the floor, below the frame; the lights fade again as they have sex off-screen. All of this takes place in a single, elaborately choreographed take. At the end of the shot, following several seconds of darkness, a spotlight slowly rises on a vase of flowers which is placed behind the lovers in the exact centre of the frame.



5:5 Shot (1c): Lighting and Narrative Meaning: after a moment of darkness, as Katsuta and Mrs. Iwata have intercourse off-screen, a fade-in on the flowers in the background center: does it have narrative significance?



This fade in on the flowers is a key and characteristic effect: it either has no narrational motivation at all, or else it accomplishes an unconventional, some might say dysfunctional, form of ellipsis. If we assume the latter to be the case, then even though only a few seconds of real time has passed, the viewer is being cued by the lighting to believe that time has passed in the narrative, the time in which the characters made love. There has been, as yet, no cutting to mark the ellipsis, as would be necessitated by classical and conventional practice. When the shot finally ends, there is a cut to an overhead shot of Mrs. Iwata, awkwardly prostrate on the floor, while Katsuta is shamefacedly turned away from her.



5:6 Shot (2): Dysfunctional Ellipsis: after the cut, the intercourse is long since ended: is the ellipsis of time indicated by the change of lighting in Shot (1), or by the cut?

This transition confirms what has occurred, but did it occur before or between the cut? No definitive interpretation is possible here, but since these shots introduce a sequence of the film that passes outside of the normal flow of space and time, definitive interpretation becomes irrelevant.

Following another elliptical cut, Katsuta steps outside of Mrs. Iwata's house with a satisfied, rather cruel expression on his face. In the next shot, Katsuta is walking away from the house when he suddenly starts up in a panic and throws his back against a bamboo fence, reaching into his kimono for a knife. As he does so he throws himself into an area of the fence bathed in the haunting blue light of the previous scene. We soon see that Katsuta's fearful reaction has been caused by Mrs. Iwata's black cat running across his path. Clearly, the film has entered a space in which memory intersects with the hallucinatory or the uncanny.



5:7 Uncanny Passage: the 'haunted' blue light shows Katsuta's fear—of Mrs. Iwata's black cat? Masculinity runs afoul of uncanny femininity

As the camera follows Katsuta's gaze, it pans dreamily away from the front door and along the fence to the right, and suddenly a superimposition of a mysterious man, looking into the camera, appears in front of the fence:



5:8 The Mark of Insecurity: the ghostly apparition of Mrs. Iwata's old partner, who scarred Katsuta's cheek

This character was Mrs. Iwata's con-artist partner in the flashback, and his fight with Katsuta left a permanent scar on the hero's face: an allegorical mark of sexual jealousy.

After an abrupt simple cut, we find that Katsuta is in his own bed at home. He wakes up startled, as if from a dream. This may be a simple ellipsis, but what follows forces the viewer to ask how much of the foregoing scene was, indeed, the product of a dream? As Katsuta goes back to sleep, he hears the voice of Mrs. Iwata and the lighting fades to black. Mrs. Iwata then enters Katsuta's room in the next, dimly-lit shot, and slowly, lovingly insinuates herself into Katsuta's arms. Katsuta moves to kiss her.



5:9 Dream Lover, Shot (1): Mrs. Iwata in Katsuta's arms

Another abrupt cut follows in which the camera shoots Katsuta and the woman in his arms from an angle exactly opposite to the previous.



5:10 Dream Lover, Shot (2): an abrupt cut from the reverse angle: now Tokiko is in Katsuta's arms: what really transpired?

This new shot is a close-up of the two lovers in which the lighting scheme has suddenly returned to normal, that is, the standard, three-point lighting scheme of typical studio practice. The viewer now finds that it is the schoolgirl Tokiko, and not Mrs. Iwata, who is in Katsuta's arms. The shot, which is a violation of the classical

axis of action, could be an attempt to highlight Katsuta's POV. What is chiefly of interest is not the disruptive effect of this formal violation, but its thematic relation to the periphery lying between dream and truth, as visualized on the boundaries of classical style. How much of what passed on-screen actually happened between Katsuta and Mrs. Iwata, and how much has passed off-screen between Katsuta and Tokiko? These moments of 'haunting' are also crucially connected to traumatic memory and tradition (the timeless space of the *ryōkan*), and betray Katsuta's obsession with a personal/national past.

### *The Old and the New*

A dialectic of past and present, traditional and contemporary, runs through *Kantō mushuku*, centred around the film's Tokyo *shitamachi* locations and the cultures that inhabit it. The first shots of the film depict the encroachment of an abrasive urban modernity: first, a close-up of Hanako with a crowd of commuters behind her; then a shot of Tokiko with a bright red train rushing behind:



5:11 Urban Modernity as Spatial Disjuncture (1)

Finally, a third schoolgirl in front of a busy line of cars:



5:12 Urban Modernity as Spatial Disjuncture (2)

The girls are clustered in a circle at the train station and the backgrounds are all typical sights of the rapidly expanding mass transport system of the early 1960s. However there is no graphic continuity between the backgrounds depicted in these shots; such large public spaces (train tracks, a commuter road) cannot be as spatially contiguous as the film suggests. The opening thus depicts modernity as spatial disjuncture, an allegory for the historical disjuncture of modern life and the unbridgeable gap between the cultural environment of modern youth and the pre-war fixation of *yakuza* like Katsuta.

Moments later, an on-location street scene reveals a group of musicians dressed in the archaic costumes used for *matsuri* (traditional street festivals). However, the musicians are in fact *chinchin donya*, or performers advertising a sale at a department store. In these unscripted observations of then-contemporary culture, Suzuki reveals the link between capitalism and pre-war cultural nostalgia. On this basis it is possible to see the film, or the authorial code within it, as a debunking, an exposure of Japan's vaunted traditional culture as deceptive and hypocritical as the *yakuza* themselves. Suzuki's *yakuza* bosses are nothing but corrupt capitalists and

pimps. This is also sometimes true of the conservative *ninkyō* films, however, whose later success at defining the ideological terrain of the *yakuza eiga* (through a disavowal of post-war contradictions) has perhaps permanently blunted what satirical force *Kantō mushuku* may have had upon its original release.

*Kantō mushuku* emphasises its own location shooting in the *shitamachi* and Asakusa neighbourhoods of Tokyo. However, in *Kantō mushuku*, as Tony Rayns noted, ‘realism evaporates as the film enters the character’s memories and obsessions.’<sup>26</sup> Dreaming and waking, Katsuta belongs to a different world, consisting of traditional *ryōkan* and Asakusa gambling dens. The film accordingly retreats from location footage into the stylized, abstract studio sets that represent these environments. They are often drenched in falling snow which, as Hasumi shows, is not a representation of the actual weather any more than it is a clear metaphor for the *yakuza* underworld.<sup>27</sup> Instead, it seems to visualize the primacy of Katsuta’s ideological world-view: the historical imaginary of Japan in the mind of one idealistic, inflexible character at one remove from reality.

As in Ozu’s post-war films, the everyday coexistence of contemporary and traditional culture is unnoticed by the characters, but Suzuki’s camera imparts a heightened awareness that emphasises incongruity. When the innocent Tokiko meets Katsuta at the boss’ house, she asks about the inscriptions on some old-fashioned oil-paper umbrellas (*wagasa*) which read ‘red clothes and white clothes.’ Katsuta replies, ‘Before the war, prisoners used to wear red clothes.... White clothes are for dying in. That’s the *yakuza* way.’ Tokiko is shocked; her idol, Katsuta, lives in a world of associations totally alien even to the boss’s daughter.

<sup>26</sup> in Field and Rayns, eds., *Branded to Thrill*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Hasumi, ‘A World without Seasons’ in Suzuki and Hasumi, p. 7-11.

Surely the most interesting of the film's social insights is that, having denied any legitimacy to the *yakuza* as representatives of traditional (pre-war) values, these same values are located in the professional con-artists, Mrs. Iwata and her husband, the gambler Okaru-Hachi (the great character actor Itō Yūnosuke). This is perhaps not surprising, for whenever Suzuki represents the surviving aspects of pre-Meiji culture in a non-perjorative way, it is invariably in the form of art and craft: Edo painting, Edo theatre in its copious manifestations, vintage popular music, and, above all, the emphasis on dreams, ghosts, and erotic obsession handed down from Heian literature.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the house of Boss Izu, in which record players, TVs, and empty beer bottles are prominent features, the immaculate house of Mrs. Iwata and Okaru-Hachi is replete with signifiers of tradition such as *shōji* paper doors and wooden porches on a water garden.<sup>29</sup> The contrast is clear. The con man, with his dedication to an old-fashioned (if criminal) craft, shows a fanaticism of purpose that represents traditional artisanship, lost in the age of mass production; he also represents an austere, stoic attention to duty that the self-sacrificing samurai of the Edo period applied to the tea ceremony as fervently as they did to the sword. One scene in particular contrasts Diamond Fuyu, the rock-n-roll loving punk with no understanding of *yakuza* culture, with Okaru-Hachi as he is seated on a tatami performing a meticulous task, the marking of cards, with the utmost precision and

<sup>28</sup> In the canonical Noh play (for instance by Zeami) the ghost is a constant structural element; *Genji monogatari* is much concerned with the vengeful ghosts of scorned women; in medieval prose collections such as *Konjaku monogatari*, the grotesque/miraculous transformations of humans into animals (through karma) is often foretold or revealed through dream. Late Edo 'romantic literature' also returned obsessively to these motifs, such as in the prose collection *Ugetsu Monogatari* by Ueda Akinari or the plays of Mokuami and Nanboku, in the latter cases with an emphasis on cruel, eroticized violence.

<sup>29</sup> Despite the relative modernity of single-family domestic architecture, Jordan Sand shows that the 1920s already saw the beginning of an intellectual reaction against urban, Westernized mass housing and a defence of 'nativist' and 'ancient' elements of domestic architecture (which some had emphasised from the very beginning of the single-family dwelling), thus allowing new associations with the traditional within a larger disavowal of capitalism. Sand's study, which is limited to the pre-war, regrettably does not address in detail the changing symbolic value and connotation of 'nativist' and 'traditional' domestic interiors throughout the century as much as he addresses their opposite, the potentially transgressive Westernized 'culture house.' Sand, *House and home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, and Bourgeois Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp.100-102; 338-41, 343-4; 363; 370-371; 376-8.



stillness. The drunken Fuyu callously hints that his sister is in love with Katsuta. But Okaru-Hachi continues his task, outwardly undistracted by this revelation of infidelity and demonstrating the kind of stoic indifference of body posture that characterizes the heroic Takakura in the *ninkyō eiga*.<sup>30</sup>



5: 13 Attention to Detail: the 'stoic' traditionalism of Okaru-Hachi and his 'art,' contrasted to the 'wild' body posturing of the *yakuza*

In this way, Suzuki turns the tables on the ideology of masculine genre cinema that *Kantō mushuku* outwardly embodies. At the end of this scene, Mrs. Iwata expects remonstrance from Okaru-Hachi, but he will not pause from his work; it is at this point that she realizes, with desolation, that she can expect nothing from her marriage other than professional like-mindedness. This is metonymic for the exclusion of women from 'traditional' culture, and it is far from certain whether Suzuki has more sympathy for a dedicated artist like Okaru-Hachi, or for a confused teenager like Fuyu who has no tradition to guide him.

<sup>30</sup> see Standish's preliminary observations on yakuza stoicism, bodily endurance, and stillness in the face of opposition: *Myth and Masculinity in Japanese Cinema*, pp. 174, 176, 178-79.

### *Crossing the Line*

Okaru-Hachi's favourite trick is to use mirrors and shiny objects to see the facedown cards that he is dealing. I wish to concentrate on the formal aspects of the scene which introduces Okaru-Hachi and the symbolism of the mirror. This scene prepares us for one of Suzuki's most prominent departures from conventional editing practice: the breaking of the standard '180 Degree Rule' of studio filmmaking. This rule ensures constant screen direction, efficient and predictable camera position, and complete spatial clarity. But the anti-constructionist Suzuki shows signs of rebellion here in forcing the audience to reckon with problematic, and sometimes inexplicable, disjuncture that grows more pronounced as the film progresses.

Consider a shot breakdown of this scene in which Katsuta enters the gambling den in order to watch the famous Okaru-Hachi at work:



5:14 A Cinematic Mirror, Shot (1): Katsuta's head appears above the painted screen of a geisha (right background), looking to screen left at Okaru-Hachi gambling. Okaru-Hachi casts a fleeting glance at something off-screen (towards right foreground)



5:15 A Cinematic Mirror, Shot (2): CU on Katsuta suddenly turning his head and looking to extreme right of screen, apparently to follow Okaru-Hachi's glance. Katsuta draws back in surprise.



5:16 A Cinematic Mirror, Shot (3): Okaru-Hachi raises his eyes and looks directly into the camera, NOT directly at the women's head in the left of centre foreground, out-of-focus.

Before Shot (3), Katsuta is looking towards Okaru-Hachi (off-screen left). The viewer expects to follow Katsuta's glance when he turns his head to see what is off-screen to the right. Instead, we find Okaru-Hachi gazing back at us. Suzuki is capitalizing on our assumption that Shot (3) should represent Katsuta's POV in a typical Shot-Reverse Shot pattern. Suzuki seems, at first, to have broken the 180 Degree Rule by suggesting to the audience that Okaru-Hachi is viewed by Katsuta from both the right and the left. In order for this to be 'true', either Shots (1), (2), or (3) would have to be

reflections in a mirror. No such mirror is present, but since Okaru-Hachi uses a ‘mirror trick’ a few minutes later, this strange continuity is entirely appropriate.

In Shot (6), the viewer discovers that Shot (3) was not a POV shot after all. This occurs only after Shot (5), a longish pan-shot, has delayed the solution to this ‘spatial mystery.’ Shot (6) is a medium shot of Katsuta’s lover, Mrs. Iwata; she is the woman whom both Katsuta and Okaru-Hachi were looking at in Shot (3), for she is the latter’s wife and accomplice.



5:17 A Cinematic Mirror, Shot (6): the object of all gazes

Mrs. Iwata’s position, in a part of the room previously unrevealed, makes her the mirror opposite of the Edo-period beauty on the screen painting. Moreover she is placed by a large red chest which ‘mirrors’ a red chest in the opposite corner. Thus, the previous shots did not actually break with classical continuity; they simply *appear* to have done so for a considerable length of time (before Shot (6)). Suzuki’s coy ‘proposal and withdrawal’ of such a break, however, is a brilliantly cinematic evocation of narrative themes of illusionism, reversal, and the mirror.

At the end of the film, however, Suzuki does make an unequivocal break with the 180 Degree Rule. Hanako tosses aside the jail-bound Fuyu, who is hopelessly

begging Hanako to wait for him for ‘seven or eight years’. Shot (1) shows Fuyu on screen right, with Hanako concealed by a screen on the left (perhaps underscoring the character’s inscrutability).



5:18 Reversals of Gender and Power, Shot (1): Fuyu on right, Hanako on left (concealed)

Shot (2) shows Hanako from Fuyu’s POV, just left of centre-frame:



5:19 Reversals, Shot (2): CU on Hanako from Fuyu's POV

Shot (3) repeats the pattern of Shot (1):



5:20 Reversals, Shot (3): repeat of the Shot (1) composition, as in standard Shot-Reverse Shot patterning

But Shot (4), instead of repeating Shot (2), abruptly cuts to a profile shot of Hanako right of centre-frame, showing a side of her body which cannot represent the POV of any character. Her eyeline does not match that of Fuyu in Shot (3).



5:21 Reversals, Shot (4): Hanako from the 'wrong' side of the classical axis of action



This is a ‘textbook’ violation of the 180° axis of action. The breaking of continuity coincides with Hanako’s challenge to a coercively traditionalist sub-culture: she brandishes infidelity as a weapon against the patriarchal exploitation which has failed to subdue her. Suzuki challenges social and formal/cinematic ‘constructionism’ at the same time. In fact each of the three continuity ‘violations’ I have discussed above (one unproblematic in Katsuta’s dream, one temporarily problematic, one thoroughly problematic) potentially reverse the gendered social relations of hierarchy and control implied by the male gaze. Dissident technique is aligned with dissident ideology along gendered lines. Hanako, more successfully than Mrs. Iwata, is still operating in an irredeemably oppressive patriarchy, but she is turning her objectification into power.

But if Hanako represents the film’s most radical departure from accepted technique, the cinematic ‘mirror’ of the gambling sequence is an interpretive key to the whole of *Kantō mushuku*. It allows the mirror—ironically the mythological symbol of Japanese sincerity and another icon of wartime nationalism—to return to its concrete function of reversing the image. Far from embodying the escape of the outcast, the *yakuza*, in their intractable power relations, are simply the mirror image of ‘legitimate’ society. Reversal is not negation, and does not yet permit the wholly ‘negative’ view of The Violence Trilogy. Nevertheless, reversal is the order of the day: martial heroism guarantees defeat (another wartime reflection); con artists are more traditional than *yakuza*; tradition itself is simply a hollow vessel through which its antithesis, capitalism, is able to move freely. Thus, rather than ‘treachery’ or ‘wandering,’ the great Suzuki motif on display here—that which melds style and subject—is relativism or scepticism, both moderate forms of negativity with respect to convention. In important scenes such as the encounters with Mrs. Iwata, the

narration will not tell us what is happening when; the visual style will not specify its significance, nor restrict itself to the culture's signifying conventions. The hero is as inscrutable as the colours that envelope him, yet in the end is ideologically determined; he is never a free individual making a legitimate choice to which the audience can align themselves. In such a deliberately uncertain universe, with patriarchal codes hemmed in and eroded everywhere by femininity and by reality, and where impermanence (*mujō*) is the only universal, how can masculine ideology assert its claim to truth? Is not the masculine ideal just another fever dream? *Kantō mushuku* separates nostalgia, and received ideology, from the possibility of truth.

The mirror is also a sort of 'window' onto a new world of filmmaking, a world now definitively marked by the authorial signature of Suzuki that, within a proscriptive mass media, is inscribed as oppositional. In this 'looking glass' cinema, narrative causality, continuity editing, and the ideological/emotional coherence permitted by secondary identification are still structurally present; but they can now be selectively and significantly reversed; or they can be emphasised in reverse proportion to visual spectacle, artifice, and semantic ambiguity. A new balance is achieved within stylistic parameters much larger than the old 'closed narrative realism.' Rather than manipulated sympathy, ideological judgment, and the satisfaction of closure, the audience (as Satō noted) now reacts multi-directionally: at one time, with the pleasure of irony; at another, with spontaneous enjoyment of the play of colour, movement, form. In *Kantō mushuku* we are given a glimpse of this new world.



## II. THE PERIOD MELODRAMAS: HISTORY, THEATRICALITY AND COLONIAL DREAMS

*Hana to dotō* and *Irezumi ichidai* follow *Kantō mushuku* chronologically, but they add little to its portrait of idealistic masculinity. What they do add is a gorgeously realized period setting that enables Suzuki to reflect directly on the pre-war past. Ironically, these two of Suzuki's most conventional melodramas are also the most overtly political: they constitute his only direct representation of marginalized labourers, exploitative managers, and colonial expansion in the Japan of his youth. In a straightforwardly Leftist social critique, these tales of the uphill battle against a corporate/political machine recall the great urban protests of the 1910s in which it seemed that the dominance of the Meiji oligarchs and the *zaibatsu* industrial barons might finally be challenged by the masses; but the nationalist episteme that compromised those very protests comes to the fore as the outcast male heroes attempt to flee from romantic attachment into the 'Utopian' dream of imperialism. Unsurprisingly, both films were castigated by Nikkatsu bosses: like the early *nuberu bagu*, they exposed the limits of direct political discourse in the studio system.

Two intersecting narrative threads run through these films: a drama of labour politics and a melodrama of failed heterosexual coupling. They are intersected by the hero (Kobayashi and then Takahashi Hideki), an outcast ex-*yakuza* who wants to go straight and joins the lowest of the lowest construction labourers.

*Hana to dotō* involves a choice between two women. A young wife (Matsubara Chieko) in need of protection for whom the hero, Kikuji, feels nothing but pity, is gleefully sidelined by Suzuki in order to make way for the bold heroine of his choosing, the tattooed 'super-geisha' Manryū (splendidly played by Kubō Naoko), an 'untameable' ex-prostitute of occupied Manchuria. Kikuji's wife Ōshige is a 'responsibility' rather than a partner, while Manryū serves as an allegory of instinct

and passion, the freedom that was associated, in the Taishō working class imagination, with the vast wilderness of Manchuria.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Kikuji and Manryū represent a rare partnership of sexual desire founded on equality. But it is not to be: Manryū risks her own life a record four times to save Kikuji, and is paid for her passion by being stabbed in a ditch by the *yakuza*. The hero barely notices her sacrifice, for by this time he has learned that Ōshige is pregnant: patriarchy and pride trump inter-subjectivity and the freedom of choice.

In *Irezumi ichidai* Suzuki invests more than ever before or since in a traditional melodrama of identification. Suzuki's hand over this largely conventional material is so assured that at times it seems like he is making a Kurosawa film rather than a Suzuki film; indeed, several shots are in homage to *Yōjinbo* (Tōhō, 1961).



5:22 Suzuki as Kurosawa: a street receding into the distant background, while fighting men pour into the shot from directly behind or beside the camera, recalls the deep-focus framing of the destruction of the brewery in *Yōjinbo* (Tōhō 1961). Note the superfluous combatant on the top of the set, reminiscent of Mifune Toshiro perching on the water tower in the earlier film

<sup>31</sup> Many film series of the 1930s, such as the *Rikōran* films of Shirley Yamaguchi, were devoted to such pastoral propaganda; Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 124-127.

Suzuki defined his approach as a deliberate ‘feminisation’ of a masculine action narrative: ‘All the violent actions were transformed into sentimental and romantic actions. It was a very feminine film.’<sup>32</sup> This extends, at least according to Suzuki’s way of thinking, to an unusual emphasis on landscape and nature, with earthen, autumnal colours supplanting Suzuki’s preference for the bold and the non-representational. The image of running water is a constant throughout, and also frequently serves as a graphic match cut between shots and scenes. The boss’ sister, Midori (Izumi Masako), is another strong female character, ebullient and entirely heedless of the strict gender proprieties of the day, and not, this time, a prostitute. And in a scene which inverts the usual gendered hierarchy of specular relations in popular cinema, the middle-aged wife of the company boss silently observes the young, sensitive art student Kenji as he removes his shirt and bathes. The film does not, from this point, attempt to re-assert the male gaze. Kenji is mother-obsessed, while the sexuality of his brother Tetsu, the conventional hero, has a similarly childish aspect: he is too ashamed to face the bar hostess he is sleeping with, and red-faced when Midori pursues him with affection. In the final scene, Tetsu’s back is turned to Midori as he looks out to sea towards Manchuria. Another *yakuza* through and through, Tetsu goes off to prison and stoically suppresses his desire to look back as Midori calls to him; when he finally does, it is already too late. Suzuki infers that the martial masculinity of the *yakuza* is not so much defined by the gaze of mastery; rather, it necessitates a kind of arrested naiveté, a total disavowal of feminine attachment. This anticipates the extreme gender dynamics of The Violence Trilogy.

In both period films, our interpretation of the politics of melodrama is qualified by a new turn towards the aesthetics of theatre for inspiration. In *Irezumi*

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<sup>32</sup> in Alastair Phillips, ed., *The Films of Suzuki Seijun* (Edinburgh Festival Programme, 1988), p. 41

*ichidai*, the final ten minutes of the film sees an aesthetic reverse course, once the narrative has removed all familial and relational ties from Tetsu and allowed him to be what he is: a killer. Natural locations give way to a studio action set piece reminiscent of 1920s *chanbara* in an expressionist, mythic space of uni-coloured rooms, endless doors, and non-diegetic lighting. In *Hana to dotō*, Suzuki's theatricality is accomplished through colour and the contrast of surface and depth. Extreme long shots of landscapes and recessed architectural interiors (some of them shot in deep focus) characterize the naturalist world of the labourers, as do the muted, earthy colours. Nagatsuka's widescreen compositions devote half of the horizontal frame to mud and straw, the dull irremediable world of labour.



5:23 History Versus Theatricality (1): The Dull, Earthen Weight of Labour: note the compositional depth applied to the worker's world

In this location footage, Suzuki uses the cinemascopic frame to emphasise landscape for the first time in his career: the hero wading through wide reedy marshes, the labourers hauling a gravel train across the seemingly endless wide screen. The

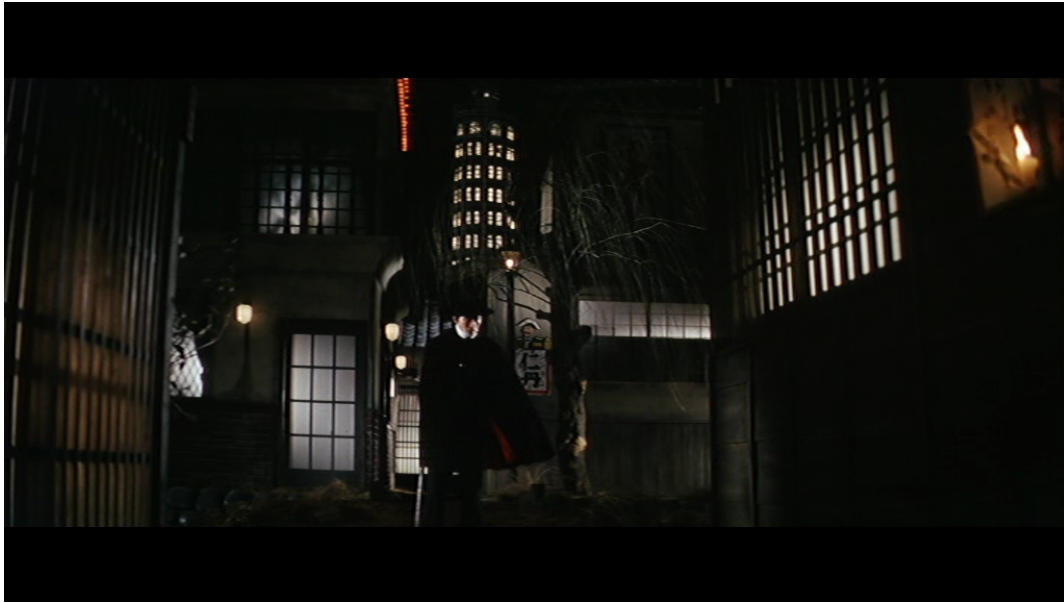
location sequences, however, are sharply contrasted by urban scenes of an exaggerated and theatrical frontality.



5:24 History Versus Theatricality (2): the architectures and visual textures of Asakusa as a Theatre of Life: note the shallow depth between the camera and urban surfaces (accompanied by an emphasis on foreground objects)

Kimura Takeo stages Asakusa crowd scenes on highly theatrical studio sets that have the atmosphere of a Taishō stage revue, full of social types and vintage iconography such as a stylised recreation of the Ryōunkaku (Twelve-Story Tower).<sup>33</sup> This is a historical fantasia representing Taishō life through its popular arts, depicting Asakusa as one great show.

<sup>33</sup> A famous symbol of Meiji modernization, also known as the *jūnikai* (twelve floors), this leisure complex was built by Scottish engineer W.K. Burton in 1890 but effectively destroyed in the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923.



5:25 History *as* Theatre: the improbably costumed, *grand guignol* villain (Kawachi Tamio) beneath Kimura's stylised recreation of Taishō's Ryōunkaku tower (note the disproportionate scaling)

Theatrical technique comes to a head in the film's absurdist climax. Kikuji is heading for a port town from which he wants to ship to Manchuria. A stylish pan shot moves from window to window of a northeast-bound train establishing that all the major characters are (coincidentally) on board. The snowy port of his destination is represented by one stylized set of ten giant, blatantly artificial snowdrifts improbably packed together like the columns of a temple, with a matted building at the top of the frame.



5:26 Theatrical (Anti-)Melodrama: the stylized sets of the curt finale

As Suzuki imposes this theatricality, the melodrama becomes so feverish that it borders on absurdity. After Manryū is abruptly slaughtered and forgotten, the policeman decides to let Kikuji escape to Manchuria. He does so by pretending to talk loudly to the assassin, despite the fact that the latter is quite dead, so that Kikuji, who is concealed only a few feet away, will overhear his message. This bizarre resolution underscores the film's playful alternation of reality, illusion, and artifice. As he speaks to the dead man, the policeman promises that Ōshige will be able to join Kikuji in Manchuria at a later time, but as Ōshige leaves, Kikuji comes out of concealment in great distress. The narrative thus ends in total uncertainty. Is the policeman's 'happy ending scenario' just another illusion? Will Kikuji once again be torn between responsibility (wife and child) and freedom (Manchuria)?

Suzuki brings theatrical artifice into direct confrontation with the viewer's expectation of a narrative and emotional resolution, and to some extent with the patriarchal structures of closure in the popular cinema. This is also Suzuki's way of impressing an authorial signature on a narrative full of liberal but less-than-radical

content by suggesting that the historical situation of workers is too serious, too much a ‘reality,’ to belong in the false, aestheticised framework of the heroic *yakuza* melodrama. Hence the division of colour and technique between the two principal milieux in both films: the world of cops and gangsters is blatantly but gleefully artificial, the other semi-realistic, yet burdened with the pessimistic weight of history (the failure of unionism).

Yet the director clearly felt more empowered in the realm of the former; in any event, he made it his signature. It is a mistake to view this stylized, self-consciously cinematic world of action melodrama as having a fixed (i.e. retrograde) ideological weight on account of its past. The cinema is reinvented far easier than reality. If stylization often represents a space of male ideological fantasy, it also demarcates it *as fantasy*, refusing the naturalistic depiction of the world of *giri* and *ninjō* (which I propose to define as the irreversible ideological relation between ‘honorific’ male violence and heterosexual relationships) that would render it as an interpretation of reality. Nor does the pleasure we take in Kimura’s fantastic and artisanal spaces diminish the establishment of a critical distance. This is exemplified by the death of Manryū; Suzuki’s curt, rapid, anti-melodramatic climax forces the question that a sentimental finale would blunt: why doesn’t Kikuji really care about his lover? In *Irezumi ichidai*, by contrast, Suzuki makes an abortive attempt to present a (differential) romantic melodrama within the classical economy of naturalism: although his treatment permits many fascinating reversals, it comes up against the limits of classical narrative, that is, against the ideological limits that had encrusted around it. Even the independent character of Midori is ultimately measured by her degree of loyalty to the male hero; indeed, this limitation makes the familiar romantic promises at the end of the film—e.g. ‘I’ll wait for you until you get out of jail’—as



thoroughly unbelievable as a Hollywood happy ending, and unworthy of this intriguing film.

Perhaps Suzuki's finest achievement, in terms of social and historical representation, is to insert a colonial subtext into the stories of even the most marginal Japanese lives of unskilled labourers, bar girls, and small-time crooks.<sup>34</sup> The working class characters speak with almost mythical fervour about the freedom and golden economic opportunities that lie awaiting in the colonies. In *Hana to dotō*, Kikuji will stop at nothing to escape to Manchuria, where he expects to find freedom from the law. In *Irezumi ichidai*, Kenji's last words, as he dies under *yakuza* swords, underscore the terrible delusion of it all: 'Brother, let's go to Manchuria!'

The emergent Japanese colonial empire is vilified, mocked, and personified in the character of the pathetic swindler, Yamano (Komatsu Hōsei). Suzuki's most despicable character, he combines the stereotype of the ageing colonial blowhard with the political informer and the crass exploiter. Yamano is a man who can only come to prominence in an era of colonial expansion: a perpetually hard-up liar and braggart who was, at one time, an agent of the 'Manchurian Land Development Program', Yamano now acts as a liaison between grafted politicians, *yakuza* bosses, industrial spies. When he is not serving his betters, he makes money by scamming the poor and desperate, including the two protagonists, who are searching for a cheap passage to Manchurian by sea. The dream of working class opportunity through expansion is strangled, symbolically, from the start. Yamano wins their confidence by telling wildly improbable stories to bar girls about his adventures as a government spy with

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<sup>34</sup> Ōshima's earlier *Taiyō no hakaba/The Sun's Burial* (Shōchiku 1960), which also featured the actor Komatsu Hōsei, had attempted to insert wartime nationalism into the lives of contemporary labourers in what could be described as a highly contrived and improbable manner.

the Kwantung Army, whose reputation was itself based upon a notorious lie.<sup>35</sup> The fact that Yamano is both a con artist *and* some sort of genuine corporate agent, a representative of power on a small scale, is a political gesture on Suzuki's part, an undisguised attack on the broadest possible swathe of pre-war imperial culture. Colonialism, which was almost universally viewed, in early Shōwa Japan, as a nationalist and spiritual crusade, a quasi-benevolent Pan-Asian scheme of unification, a bulwark against communism, and a necessary component of national defence, is treated here as the swindle of the century. The studios, on the other hand, continued to churn out 'war-retro' pictures throughout the early 1960s,<sup>36</sup> in which the nationalist, racial, and quasi-sacred concept of the *kokutai* remained entrenched, while the history of the Manchurian occupation was largely avoided.

#### CONCLUSION: A *NAGAREMONO* IDEAL?

It is illuminating to compare the three protagonists whom we encounter in these films. In some ways, Kikuji and the more sympathetic Tetsu are both 'stunted growths' of pre-war militarism. They are not only afraid of femininity, but incapable of inter-subjective relations except for those male ties which lead, inevitably, to gang ties. Their behaviour relates not simply to Oedipal overdetermination but to a prescriptive, pathological culture of martial masculinity. Standish notices this in the Japanese cinema as 'the rejection and denial of the feminine aspects of male nature. Symbolically, this is built into the narrative through the negation of women

<sup>35</sup> The Kwantung Army was originally a protective garrison for the leased territory along the South Manchurian Railway after the Russo-Japanese War. As the major Japanese military presence in Northern China, the Kwantung army became so influential as an advocate for imperial expansion abroad—and Ultra-Nationalist political thought at home—that they single-handedly engineered the Manchurian Incident of 1931, an invasion based on the false accusation of Chinese dissidents for attempting to blow up the rail line. They were consequentially able to force the Imperial command into establishing the colonial Manchukuo state which they administered: Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000), pp. 578-589.

<sup>36</sup> Some examples of the genre, which focused overwhelmingly on the heroism of fighter pilots in different phases of the war, include *Hawaii Middowei daikaikūsen: Taiheiyō no arashi*/I Bombed Pearl harbour (Tōei 1960) and *Kurenai no umi*/Blood on the Sea (Tōhō 1961).

completely as in...wartime productions *or*...in the post-war cinema, the rejection of lovers.<sup>37</sup> We have seen many examples of the latter in the *yakuza* sequence, but there is also evidence that Suzuki sympathizes with these men as part of his afflicted generation, arrested in its maturation by the war. For such men, gang life and wandering are the only options, but these paths are neither separable nor sustainable: both lead to death.

Ryōgoku Midori, in a fascinating, rambling 1966 article on the fear of domesticity in Suzuki's films, sees an attempt to construct a different type of *nagaremono* protagonist (although she does not use the actual term *nagaremono*). She relates this subtler version of the male loner to the 'guilty conscience of stability' she detects in the great existentialist writer Sakaguchi Ango:<sup>38</sup> in other words, a post-war social and political guilt at investing in domestic arrangements which had become writ large, in the wartime era, as private property and the coercive family-state (*kazoku kokka*). For Ryōgoku, Suzuki's protagonists follow a romantic ideal of nomadism as 'opting out' of society: an anti-social ethical choice.<sup>39</sup> Certainly the character of Katsuta represents a painful (masochistic?) renunciation of intense romantic longing: as he says in voice-over, 'I threw away all ambition and all chivalry (*ninkyō*), I succumbed to impulse...' <sup>40</sup> His later renunciation of romance is not necessarily based on the fear or rejection of femininity, but on the rejection of a domestic model of family.

Standish seems to read the *nagaremono* ideal, like other masculine idealities, as pure psycho-social flight from the feminine, both internally and externally, towards

<sup>37</sup> Standish (2000), p. 108.

<sup>38</sup> Ryōgoku, 'Onna jōi no shisō: Suzuki Seijun ni tsuite' (Thoughts of a Superior Woman: On Seijun Suzuki), *Eiga hyōron* (May 1966) in Motomura Shūji, ed., *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū*, p. 129.

<sup>39</sup> Kurahara Koreyoshi had depicted a similar quest of social escape in *Nikui an-chikushō/I Hate but Love* (Nikkatsu 1962), though it is dramatised in such blatantly gendered and misogynistic terms that the self-righteous hero strikes his girlfriend, who cannot comprehend his desire for freedom, no less than six times during the film.

<sup>40</sup> translated by Ryōgoku, 'Thoughts of a Superior Woman: On Seijun Suzuki,' p. 129.

a (mythical) masculine grouping that permits ‘true intimacy.’<sup>41</sup> Ryōgoku, on the other hand, seems to see the *nagaremono*’s search for independence as an intervening state between successful heterosexual relationships and homosocial bonding. One might infer that in order to accomplish the true outcast ideal, the drifter must not only renounce the romantic relations he yearns for; he must also renounce the ‘primacy of the male group’, just as Tetsu is ready to flee from the homosocial solidarity of the labourers in order to ‘go it alone’ as a colonial drifter.<sup>42</sup> In such a situation, as Standish noted, the homosocial relations between individual men (other drifters) become the only form of social existence, though necessarily fleeting.<sup>43</sup>

Ryōgoku identifies a conflicted, perhaps self-imploding masculine project rather than the more triumphant and linear patriarchal construct that Standish explores in relation to the Tōei films. There is a theoretical distinction to be made between, say, the ethical renunciation of the family and a pure psycho-social reflex of misogyny—or between attachment to a brother and a whole patriarchal ethos. But in practice and reality, such distinctions collapse. This reveals the strength of Standish’s critique. According to Ryōgoku, Suzuki remains invested in the *nagaremono* ideal;<sup>44</sup> yet he emphasises, more than most, its failure. For Suzuki, as for many of the viewers of *yakuza* films in the 1960s, political dissent from the right—in the form of the martial ‘outcast’—may have seemed preferable to no dissent at all. But in Suzuki’s version, as Ryōgoku noted, the hero’s independence is always bound by the contract of *ninkyō*, an internalized and inescapable social commitment. It is in Suzuki’s version, above all others, that masculine essentialism and the erotics of violence render the idea of rebellion from the right as delusional. For Suzuki, then, the only ideal that remains is

<sup>41</sup> Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 309, 316-317; *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 51, 82, 92, 169, 173-4, 179-80.

<sup>42</sup> McDonald mentions a pre-war precedent for both the ‘romantic’ and the ‘truly’ outcast hero in Tsuji Yorihiro’s *Kaketoji Tokijirō* (1929), p. 172.

<sup>43</sup> Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, p. 295.

<sup>44</sup> Ryōgoku, pp. 129-30.

a negative and unattainable one: a desire to discover how the outsider lives at the price of *all* emotional bonds.

There is an irony here that Ryōgoku does not address. Katsuta, the romantic, goes to jail full of self-righteous pride. But White Fox Tetsu, a preternatural killing ‘animal’, is jealous of the fact that his brother died for love. For Standish, the ‘tragic hero’ trope is built on the notion that a ‘pure’ masculine ideal must be opposed by the forces of social control. But in regretting his incapacity for romance (in favour of sublimated, libidinal violence), it is Tetsu who recognizes the ultimate futility of his own persona; the sense of failure becomes more important than the ideal. Again, for Standish, the structuring conflict of the Tōei *ninkyō/nagaremono* films is that between *jingi* (honorific masculinity) and the law (social control).<sup>45</sup> For Suzuki—who recognizes and yet departs from this structure through dream and vision—the supervening struggle is simply that between *jingi* and sexuality, or better, between sexuality and *all* social codes.

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<sup>45</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 160-2, 165.

## CHAPTER SIX: MEMORIES OF FLESH AND FASCISM: THE *NIKUTAI* TRILOGY (1964-66)

### INTRODUCTION: DISCOMFITING CONTINUITIES: THE FLESH TRILOGY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Of all Suzuki's films, *Nikutai no mon/Gate of Flesh*, *Shunpuden/Story of a Prostitute*, and *Kawachi karumen/Carmen from Kawachi* provide the most clear example of a thematic grouping, and indeed they have been referred to as Suzuki's *Nikutai* (Flesh) Trilogy.<sup>1</sup> The first two films are period dramas that represent Japan in the immediate post-war and war years respectively. They were adapted from stories by the popular author Tamura Taijirō, founder and exponent of the *Nikutai bungaku* (Literature of the Flesh) that emerged in the immediate post-war era.<sup>2</sup> The final film is a *gendai-geki* adapted from Suzuki's favoured contemporary author, Tōkō Kon (author of the two *Akutarō* films) and was tailored to expand upon questions raised by the earlier films concerning sexual politics, the culture of capitalism, and the post-war continuity of the Japanese social order. These issues are discussed in Part One of this chapter.

Each film stars the remarkable actress Nogawa Yumiko, who plays essentially the same role of a country girl who turns to prostitution in hard times. Nogawa was the only star to be entirely discovered by Suzuki. As a screen presence, she demonstrates

<sup>1</sup> Jasper Sharp, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Film* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow press, 2011), p. 229. Ueno Kōshi, *Suzuki Seijun zen eiga* (Tokyo: Rippu shobō, 1986), p. 70, and Isoda/Todoroki, *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2006), p. 208, refer to the films collectively as the *nikutai* films.

<sup>2</sup> The instant success, in March 1947, of Tamura's short story *Nikutai no mon* sparked this much-publicized literary cycle. The works of other authors, such as Sakaguchi Ango, a great influence on Suzuki, were also publicly regarded as contributors to *Nikutai bungaku*. See Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 55-61; J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 57-60.

an earthy, vital physicality and frank sexuality which, the director claims, could not have been achieved by the more prestigious contract stars at Nikkatsu.<sup>3</sup> Nogawa was intended by both director and studio to push the boundaries of sexual representation in studio cinema. A star personality would have been inappropriate, for Nogawa's character is that of a lower-class 'everywoman' who functions as an allegorical representation of 'ordinary' Japanese people,<sup>4</sup> much as the heroine of Imamura's *Nippon konchūki*/*Insect Woman* (Nikkatsu 1963) presents a panorama of recent Japanese history through her eyes. One might view the *Flesh Trilogy* as both competition with, and an aesthetic response to, Suzuki's rival Imamura.<sup>5</sup>

The *Flesh Trilogy* is thus of vital importance to the development of Suzuki's differential signature. Notwithstanding the blatantly commercial derivation of the project, Suzuki's *Nikutai no mon* is the director's most audacious visual tapestry up to that time. I do not use the word 'tapestry' lightly, as the film's most notable visual devices include the superimposition of two different POV images onto the same frame at the same time, utilising both sides of the long Nikkatsu-scope frame to literally realize a polysemic image. Suzuki went even further, incorporating narrative events and the mental images of the protagonist into the same frame.

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<sup>3</sup> Isoda/Todoroki, p. 208; cf. Suzuki in Chris Desjardins, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2005), p. 147.

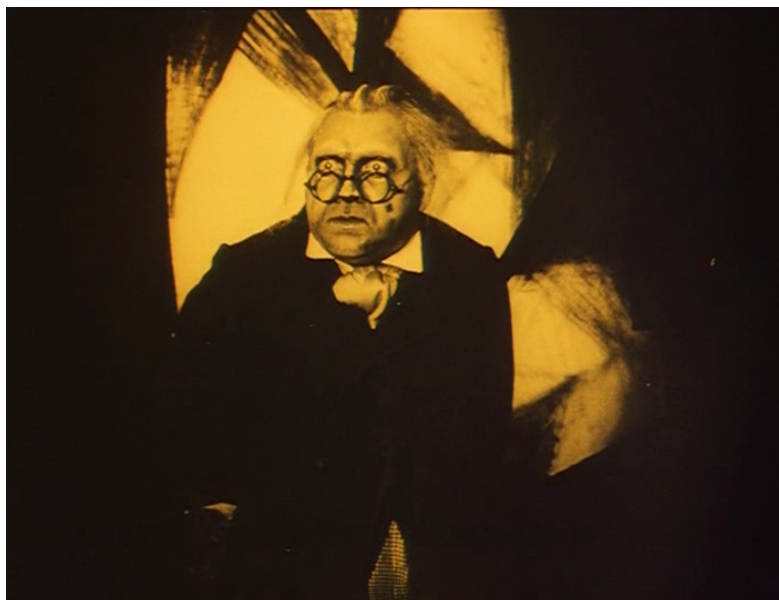
<sup>4</sup> See Igarashi on prostitution and the female body as allegory in post-war popular culture, pp. 57-58, 108-114.

<sup>5</sup> Suzuki's films were frequently attached to those of Imamura as B-pictures; *Nippon konchūki* had been paired with *Kantō mushuku*, and Suzuki has frequently stated that he shot his own films with anxious regard for the A-pictures that they would precede: for example, Suzuki, 'The Days of *Kantō mushuku*' (from a 1972 lecture) in Suzuki and Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem = Suzuki Seijun: the desert under the cherry blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 38.



6:1 Cinema Palimpsest: superimposition of the protagonist and her imaginary world in the same frame

Because such combinatory images deny perspective, they emphasise by their very nature the flatness of the cinema screen and may represent an homage to the flat 'two-dimensional' artistry of German expressionist classics such as of *Das Cabinet des Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919).



6:2 Expressionism's 'Two Dimensional' Artistry: shallow proximity, shading, and flat theatrical backdrops conceal the actual depth of the filmed space



Suzuki's film creates the effect of a two-dimensional tapestry or pre-modern Japanese narrative screen (*emaki*). And by integrating narrative and mental images, *Nikutai no mon* comes closer to the 'scattered attribute space' of non-perspectival painting, including the surrealist works of Magritte and Matisse, in which various relevant images are placed on the canvas in no particular spatial or thematic order. In addition, it made famous the experiments with primary and non-diegetic colour discussed in the previous chapter. A meticulous recreation of the streets of Tokyo in 1946 becomes, simultaneously, an abstract canvas of often non-diegetic primary colours and stylized, disproportionate set designs. Suzuki and Kimura Takeo combined a representation of recent Japanese history with an anti-realist mise-en-scène that projects a sort of shallow beauty in spite of sordid narrative events, including the actual, on-screen slaughter of a cow, which is intercut with expressions of lust/hunger from the prostitutes who watch this 'spectacle.' The scene brings home the savagery of everyday street life in 1946 in a way that, for Suzuki, dramatic scenarios could not.<sup>6</sup> Part Two of this chapter focuses on how the highly stylized representation of this violent milieu turns historical recreation into a subject not for melodrama, but for political reflection.

*Shunpuden* contains such remarkable non-diegetic and two-dimensional Suzuki effects as a man turning into a cardboard cut-out as a representation of internal disintegration. Not willing to repeat himself, Suzuki opted to visualize the narrative not through flat superimpositions, but multi-planar compositions of recessed spaces,

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<sup>6</sup> John Dower, *Embracing Defeat* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), pp. 89-104, 107-110.

in addition to a more intensive use of discontinuity editing. The result is a more avant-garde film that is less indebted to expressionism.

Relating the Alice-like encounters of a wide-eyed rural girl with the ersatz spectacle of contemporary, commercial Osaka, *Kawachi karumen* presents a cavalcade of discontinuity, non-diegetic and Brechtian gesture, and occasional surrealist transformation that is suited to its disorienting milieu, yet above all enables a critical reflection on the place of women in it.

*Nikutai no mon* and *Shunpuden* are milestones in Japanese cinema history for reasons that are clearer in retrospect than they were at the time. The former, a story about a gang of female prostitutes who band together only to fall apart over sexual jealousy, was specifically commissioned by Nikkatsu as an erotic entertainment showcasing (limited) female nudity and sadomasochistic scenarios.<sup>7</sup> It is the first recognizable Nikkatsu *roman poruno*, a variation on the *pinku eiga* (soft-core sex films called ‘pink cinema’) that would dominate studio production in the 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

*Nikutai no mon* was Suzuki’s biggest commercial success, giving rise to four remakes.<sup>9</sup> It thus had an immense, if indirect, influence on Nikkatsu’s decision to develop and, from 1971, to concentrate exclusively on its erotic productions (*erodokushon*). Tōei and Daiei studios quickly followed this trend. Suzuki in fact

<sup>7</sup> Nikkatsu released the film under the ‘adults only’ certificate that had stimulated and then plagued the production of *Yajū no seishun*.

<sup>8</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 210; the *roman poruno* has yet to be the subject of comprehensive scholarly analysis either in Japanese or English. The rare general overviews, such as Jasper Sharp’s *Behind the Pink Curtain* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2008) and Satō’s *Nihon eigashi, Volume 3* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), pp. 160-166, have ignored the rather obvious influence of Suzuki’s film. Earlier French overviews recognized, but did not explicate, the connection: Jean-Paul Le Pape, ‘Le Cinema Pink: Un Certain Miroir,’ *Le Cinema Aujourd’hui* no. 15 (Hiver 1979-80), pp. 51-54; Max Tessier, ‘L’exutoire du Roman Poruno,’ from the same volume, pp. 56-63.

<sup>9</sup> These include a 1977 remake by Nikkatsu under the generic banner of *roman poruno*, directed by Nishimura Shōgorō, Suzuki’s former Assistant Director, and a 1988 version for Tōei by the well-known *yakuza* film director Gosha Hideo.

disliked the *roman poruno* genre,<sup>10</sup> and his aesthetic cannot be held responsible for Nikkatsu's subsequent decisions. But his historical impact on the Japanese cinema was immense, and remains unappreciated; this includes his being the first director to use *maebari*, a hygienic covering for genitalia.<sup>11</sup>

*Shunpuden*, once again marketed as an erotic romance, turned out to be commercial cinema's most abrasive confrontation with its imperialist past, and hence was reviled by establishment critics. It did not help that both *Nikutai no mon* and *Shunpuden* had been successfully adapted to film before by distinguished directors, the former in 1948 by Makino Masahiro, the latter in 1950 by Taniguchi Senkichi, with a cautious script by Kurosawa.<sup>12</sup> Both films, particularly the latter, were celebrated by establishment critics. However Occupation film policy, the threat of censorship, and the representational mores of the cinema at the time ensured that these films entirely avoided the sexual frankness of Tamura's stories, and in the case of Taniguchi's film avoided the subject of prostitution altogether. In light of this, Nikkatsu management was astute in judging that the time (the mid-1960s) was ripe for a revisitation of Tamura's work, even if their interests were squarely commercial. And while the critical reception of Suzuki's *Flesh Trilogy* was hampered by negative comparison to the original films, in retrospect it is clear that the director strove to differentiate his cinema from, and in many cases actively negate, those films. In doing

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<sup>10</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, pp. 210-11

<sup>11</sup> This was, of course, to prevent the revelation of pubic hair onscreen in accordance with Eirin's self-censorship standards; the *maebari* became standard practice for Nikkatsu's erotic films. This development alone, which seems to predate the use of a similar device in Hollywood, can be considered to have had a tremendous impact on the aesthetics and representation of sexuality in Japanese, if not international, cinema. Isoda and Todoroki, p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> Makino's film was independently produced; Taniguchi's film, for Tōhō, was under the title *Escape at Dawn/Akatsuki no dassō*.

so, he advanced his stylistic signature and defined his politics of representation in resistance to the limitations of classical studio realism and the well-known post-war ‘liberal humanism’ of Taniguchi, Kurosawa, and Tamura himself.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, I would argue that it is impossible to fully understand the politics of Suzuki’s *Nikutai no mon* without reference to its sequels. Because of its damning of the American Occupation, in part through the common *topos* of rape by American Military Police, *Nikutai no mon* has seemed to many critics (who turn a deaf ear to its equally hostile portrayal of the *yakuza*) like an all-too-familiar scenario of Japanese ‘victim consciousness’,<sup>14</sup> with a facile opposition between the evils of Americanism and nostalgia for an unblemished pre-war Japan. This binary ideology had been apparent in many ‘war-retro’ studio films of the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> This characterization is inaccurate, but it is only with *Shunpuden*, one of the most uncompromising portraits of Japanese colonialism, that the full breadth of Suzuki’s critique emerges. The American occupation is merely one side of a bad equation. At the other side is the growth of such pre-war ills as militarism and a bourgeois, commoditized world view. Taken together, they demonstrate the same coercive dynamics and hierarchies of power, including the continuity of an entrenched patriarchal elite across the bridge of

<sup>13</sup> Koschmann, pp. 51-57, explores the relation of negativity and irony to early post-war ‘humanist’ literature, but we should be cautious of applying this to the realist practice of studio cinema during the Occupation, which is predominantly reconstructionist in tone. Even at its most sceptical and individuated (e.g. Kurosawa’s *Nora inu/Stray Dog*, 1949), studio realism tended to come down in favour of the restoration of law and order.

<sup>14</sup> On the cinematic representation of post-war discourses of ‘victim consciousness’ (*higaisha ishiki*), see Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), pp. 146-158 and Standish, *Politics, Porn and Protest* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 52-57. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto argues, persuasively, that the rejection of victim consciousness defined Ōshima’s early films: Yoshimoto, ‘Questions of the New: Ōshima Nagisa *Cruel Story of Youth* in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer, *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 176-180. This is the obvious intent of films such as *Shiiku/The Catch* (Sōzōsha, 1963) and this position tended to colour the early *nuberu bagu* in general: see Standish, *Politics, Porn and Protest*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>15</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity*, pp. 69-72, 86, 95, 117, 151, 154.

war.

It is necessary to revisit, at least superficially, the post-war ideological landscape in order to appreciate just how counter-hegemonic Suzuki's representation of history in the *Flesh Trilogy* actually was. For the historian Carol Gluck, the post-war survival and reconstruction of Japan was made possible by widespread beliefs in a 'fundamental break' from the (wartime) past and a new beginning:

The time of the surrender broadcast was inscribed in Japanese memory as the fictive moment when the past ended and the present began. Willing time to be broken and history severed, Japan turned towards the future....The New Japan, as so many called it, was conceived as an inversion of the old....[but] the prewar past, to be obliterated, had first to be retold.<sup>16</sup>

This retelling required a 'heroic narrative...of an unjust war with clearly identified villains....[The Pacific War] could have been avoided only if its armed forces had kept away from politics.'<sup>17</sup> Yoshikuni Igarashi's *Bodies of Memory* attempts to explicate in detail the contents of this 'official narrative' of the war years, agreed upon and perpetuated by both the Japanese and the American Occupation. This narrative saw defeat as a 'sacrifice needed for Japan's future betterment' and for the survival of its *kokutai*, its national body politic. Further, Japan in its new 'alliance' with the U.S. applied a narrative of 'rescue and conversion' which the Japanese media, most notably the cinema, had applied to its own colonial acquisitions in the 1930s. Just as Japan had 'rescued' China and Manchuria for its betterment, so 'the United States rescued Japan from the menace of its militarists, and Japan was converted into

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<sup>16</sup> 'The Past in the Present' in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1993), p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Gluck, p. 83.

a peaceful, democratic country under its tutelage.<sup>18</sup> For Igarashi, this was the narrative upon which MacArthur and SCAP actively collaborated with the Imperial office, and even today remains ingrained in the Japanese consciousness.

Suzuki's trilogy is an almost point-by-point negation of the official narrative from the hindsight of the mid-1960s. In his vision, Japan—the lower Japan, the *shitamachi* world of ordinary people—was never rescued from its patriarchal class of military, bureaucratic and business elites. The U.S., far from being the rescuer, acted as the guarantor of this elite power, re-establishing a regime of capital under a government/corporate conglomerate. Even ignoring this collusion with former imperial elites, Leftist and Libertarian thinkers in post-war Japan had little reason to support the cold war politics and ham-fisted censoriousness of the U.S. Occupation.<sup>19</sup>

From Suzuki's vantage point, the post-war future was not bright; he doubted that individual sacrifices of the war were worth making for the survival of any body politic. What his films most profoundly negate, however, is the notion of a fundamental 'break' for post-war Japanese culture. For Suzuki, Japan was only nominally converted to democracy: it remained an authoritarian state organized at the lower levels by deep and inherited social coding, through which ordinary social groups—women, salarymen, *yakuza*—re-enacted varieties of fascism that 'the official

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<sup>18</sup> Igarashi, p. 13

<sup>19</sup> Much as it decried its military subordination to the U.S., it was the Japanese Right (including unreconstructed militarists) that forged extensive cooperative ties with American authorities both during and after the Occupation (1945-1952), for it shared with the U.S. the common goals of combatting socialism, suppressing trade unionism, and reinvigorating Corporate Japan as an active link in the economic world system of the Cold War era (for example as a profitable military supplier during the Korean War). It was the political Left, therefore, reacting to the Occupation's Red Purge of 1950 and other suppressions of union activism, that understandably exhibited an early and bitter Anti-Americanism, a feeling of betrayal by the very advocates (and enforcers) of the democracy that the Left had been, in theory, prepared to accept and extol as Japan's bright future. John Dower, 'Peace and Democracy in Two Systems,' in Gordon, *Postwar Japan as History*, pp. 4-5, 9-10, 13-16, 18-27. cf. Koschmann, pp. 44-48, on the democratic optimism of Leftist writers.

narrative' attributed to military leaders. *Nikutai no mon* is filled with such examples: the soldiers cannot escape their indoctrination, while the clique of post-war prostitutes will only sleep with Japanese as a point of racial pride; they govern each other's behaviour through invasive rules and the threat of punishment; their leader dons *yakuza* tattoos and declares that her only interest is in power; while even the 'innocent' heroine, played by Nogawa, seduces and destroys an African-American priest purely as a demonstration of spite, power, and racism.

This is a point at which Suzuki diverges from Tamura, his source author, in what is otherwise a faithful adaptation. Tamura idealistically saw female sexuality as a force of nature that could counter and overcome a repressive Japanese tradition of thought.<sup>20</sup> Suzuki's version is characteristically more negative, and in my view a stronger and more complex misreading. The female body, and sexuality in general, may be a site of political resistance, precisely because the history of Japanese patriarchal thought had attempted to control it with only partial success (as in Mizoguchi's 1936 masterwork *Naniwa erejii/Naniwa Elegy*). But for Suzuki, the radical possibilities of the body are contingent and ephemeral. Having endured the bodily conditioning of the war regime, Suzuki appreciated the power of ideology. The history of the young woman, played in each film by Nogawa, is the history of the *loss* of natural sexuality whether to the war, the fight to survive, or the market forces of post-war society. She recovers only a desperate and limited freedom through personal rebellion, or through a masochism which reverses the sadistic presumption of

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<sup>20</sup> Igarashi pp. 55-57, 60-61.

Tamura's story, in which only (male) violence can release a truly dynamic sexuality.<sup>21</sup> Where Tamura willed the female body as a permanent laboratory of democracy, a site for escaping the historical past and forging a brighter future, Suzuki, looking back from that anxious future, sees a bifurcation between (bodily) resistance and survival. As Igarashi shows, popular post-war melodrama overwhelmingly associated the reconstruction ideal with the resubmission of female bodies to the control of law and order.<sup>22</sup> But in Suzuki's film, Maya's decision to die as a lover, rather than live as a fascist, is a rebellion against a society in which survival means the regimentation of sexuality to new market forces and old fascisms. It is an extraordinary personal act for a heroine as exotic and non-conformist as her name, but politically it changes nothing: history is implacable. However, in the sex scene between Maya and the war veteran (played by Shishido Jō) leading up to her rebellion, Suzuki produces a non-diegetic shimmering effect around each body which renders bodily boundaries amorphous and permeable. This proposes a new standard for inter-subjectivity and gender fluidity, if only visually, if only through sexuality.

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<sup>21</sup> Igarashi, pp. 59-60.

<sup>22</sup> Igarashi, pp. 106-113.





6:3 Cinematic 'Inter-Subjectivity': a non-diegetic shimmering effect around bodies wrapped in intercourse

Suzuki affirms the non-conformist 'here and now-ness' of the body: but only at the price of acknowledging the political inefficacy of post-war sexual 'liberation' in the new order of things.<sup>23</sup> This pessimism had the benefit of hindsight. Here, one is tempted to read not only a regard for the limitations of the (democratic/sexual) 'liberation' of the Occupation, but a regard for the limitations of post-war artistic discourse as well, i.e. liberal humanism, melodrama, and narrative realism.<sup>24</sup>

## I. THE MYTHOLOGY OF GROUP DYNAMICS: DOMESTICITY AND *YAMATO DAMASHI*

In *The Flesh Trilogy*, Suzuki's Negative Aesthetic comes into full force as a formal practice and social critique. The following section treats the latter, as the trilogy amounts to a broad indictment of Japanese social organization as satirised

<sup>23</sup> Ōshima had advanced a similar speculation in his *Taiyō no hakaba/Burial of the Sun* (Shōchiku, 1960), a genuinely nihilistic depiction of degrading slum life in contemporary Japan. Through various contrivances, Ōshima relates behaviour in the slums to fascism and the war experience, while the opportunistic, survivalist heroine discovers that 'vitality is not enough': Ōshima, quoted in David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre* (Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana, 1988), p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> The post-war social theorist Maruyama Masao had already criticized Tamura's *Nikutai bungaku* as being a shallow and limiting 'realism' (i.e. naturalism) which lacked a thoroughly modern political subjectivity: Igarashi, pp. 61-63.

through the allegorical figure of the prostitute. The films propose a damning structural critique by representing the group dynamics of Japanese society as inherently unstable and anti-democratic. The director has said recently, ‘When you watch a Western...its foundation is the spirit of sacrifice. The Japanese don’t have that element. A code is the foundation for us, for each group. As an army has its own code, the prostitutes have *their* own code.’<sup>25</sup> The characters of both films are organized into gendered groups whose ethics and behaviours are comparable in narrative, ideological, and cinematic/generic terms. The male group, represented by the military or the *yakuza*, demonstrates the continuity of patriarchal power and gendered oppression. As the adjutant general (Tamagawa Isao) in *Shunpuden* batters a ‘comfort woman’ who has been forced to serve the soldiers at the front, he bellows, ‘How dare your filthy mouth speak the Emperor’s name!’ This is Suzuki’s most succinct expression of the grand hypocrisy of Japanese patriarchy. The other group (female prostitutes) are symptomatic of the increasing commodification of Japanese life, and its effect on the formation of personal desire, whether sexual or material.

It emerges from this trilogy that prostitution, not flesh, is Suzuki’s grand metaphor. Prostitution is enslavement, a (gendered) dependency imposed by force. In *Shunpuden*, Harumi’s romantic enslavement to the dislikeable lieutenant (Kawachi Tamio) is likewise a prostitution of the soul, imposed by the social psychology of wartime Japanese culture and constantly at war with Harumi’s biological instincts toward self-preservation and sexual satisfaction. Throughout the film, her

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mori Jun in 2005, available on the Criterion DVD release of *Story of a Prostitute* (ASIN: B0009HLCW4).

enslavement is likened to the abuse of the minds and bodies of the male soldiers by the military hierarchy.

In *Nikutai no mon*, the allegory of prostitution aims to explain what, in Suzuki's view and that of many intellectuals of the day, was the failure of Japan to achieve a 'new start' in the post-war era. In the film, the disastrous implosion of a potentially benign 'union' of female prostitutes is itself allegorical, and is the result of two interrelated factors. The first is the commodification of desire and the body under the new, 'Americanized' post-war regime of capital. As the brutish Roku (Ishii Tomiko) puts it, imitating the signs of the fish vendors, the girls sell their bodies 'direct from producer to consumer.' This new libidinal economy is principally expressed in the narrative by the ironclad, yet totally absurd first principle of the gang: never have sexual relations for free. The second factor is the destabilisation of a horizontal union of equals by power relations of domination and submission. These power relations substitute for the body's lack of free pleasure and find their outlet in unstable violence, expressed by the way in which the leader, Sen (Kasai Satoko), who is unable to have an orgasm, punishes 'insubordination' based on her own sexual and psychological needs. This mutual dependency of ruler and subjugated looks backward, historically, to the submission of the Japanese people to the military state, and forward to the submission of Japan to the economic and Cold War directives of the United States.

In both cases—the enslavement of women and soldiers to wartime patriarchy and the enslavement of post-war survivors to the ruthless gang leaders—the state of patriarchal subjugation is challenged by the potential for revolutionary social change.

In *Shunpuden*, that potential is represented by Harumi, a woman capable of biting the tongue off of a male lover who has lied to her. Her deliberate sexual betrayal of the adjutant general attempts to undermine patriarchy with the only force—female infidelity—that it can neither accommodate nor control. In *Nikutai no mon*, similarly, Suzuki recognizes the obvious potential of a commune of prostitutes who live together, pool their resources for economic survival in a time of starvation, and protect themselves from pimps and predators. Unfortunately, this revolutionary potential—particularly marked in the ‘Tokyo Year Zero’ environment in which survival was popularly thought to supervene over Japanese mores—goes unrealized in both cases. In Suzuki’s satirical analysis, which seeks to draw a reductive or general lesson that applies to Japanese society before and after surrender, the possibility of change is undermined neither by circumstance nor (surprisingly) by the conspiracies of patriarchy. It is the entropic nature of group dynamics in and of themselves—their susceptibility to corruption in the form of hierarchies of domination and submission—which subverts that potential from the very beginning, thus ensuring the continuity of social organisation across the ‘break’ of the war.

Suzuki’s ‘case studies’—soldiers, *yakuza*, and prostitutes—maintain themselves by codes of conduct, and these codes are informed by social ideologies which have had such a longstanding importance to the Japanese social structure as to deserve to be called ‘mythologies.’ In the case of the male groups, the mythology examined in *The Flesh Trilogy* is that of ‘*yamato damashi*’ one of the oldest and most resonant of

the patriotic slogans of Japanese nationalism.<sup>26</sup> Suzuki's examination of female groups of the war era is more surprising. Rather than presenting them in relation to wartime ideology, the director confronts a bourgeois mythology with an equally decisive influence on the period: the myth of domesticity as the natural outcome of heterosexual romance.

*Nikutai no mon* begins with the charismatic figure of a young *yakuza* (Wada Kōji) who acts as a pimp for American soldiers. Despite this unpatriotic line of work, the *yakuza* exclaims that '*yamato damashii* still lives!' when he learns that a GI has been knifed by a Japanese veteran (Shishido). But it is remarkable that the *yakuza*, seemingly too young to have fought in the war himself, perpetuates a metaphysical slogan of empire despite military defeat, the occupation of Japan, and the renunciation of imperial divinity only months before the story takes place. Has the wartime ethos of 'national mobilisation' proven unassailable by fact, or is the young man simply mouthing a slogan of the *yakuza*? The post-war decade was a watershed era of conservative political activity (mostly in the form of union busting) on the part of *yakuza* and ultranationalist ex-military activists, with extensive (and wealthy) networks of association running between the two groups.<sup>27</sup> Suzuki represents the development of post-war conservative nationalism (presented as a psychosocial reaction to fears of diminished masculinity) and condemns its hypocrisy, not only

<sup>26</sup> This refers to the legendary pre-historic kingdom of *yamato* under the entirely mythical Emperor Jimmu. *Yamato damashii* was a way of separating 'native' Japanese from Chinese culture in the middle ages and entered the modern (Edo) period as a way of praising samurai *seppuku*. Taken up by Meiji oligarchs as a patriotic ideal during the wars of the period, the term came to identify martial valour as a chief trait of Japanese national exceptionalism, and ascribes a sacred, transcendental origin to both. It attained the status of a quasi-official battle cry of Japanese troops during the war period 1932-1945.

<sup>27</sup> Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 139-161; David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro, *The Yakuza*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 32-42, 46-66.

because the patriotic *yakuza* were only too happy to participate in American capitalism for gain, but because their post-war prominence and political connections represented ‘business as usual’ for the ruling patriarchal elites.

Corporal Mikami, the male protagonist of *Shunpuden*, is one in a long line of young political fanatics in Suzuki’s films. He remains steadfast to the ideal of dying for emperor and country, even after experiencing firsthand the utter hypocrisy of the military hierarchy and the crimes committed in the imperial name: an adjutant who wants to have him executed out of sexual jealousy, a general who lies about deserters and incompetents to protect the (undeserved) reputation of the battalion, and a bureaucracy which court-martials Mikami for cowardice and desertion merely because the other soldiers abandoned him, unconscious, in a trench. Fully aware of the worthlessness of his superiors, Mikami’s patriotism is so deep that, given the choice of being executed by the Japanese or fleeing with the PLA in the company of other Japanese deserters, Mikami chooses the former without hesitation, and at Harumi’s expense. When Harumi sings a sentimental Chinese ballad with the PLA soldiers, achieving a rare moment of inter-cultural subjectivity, Mikami begins to bleed, a physiognomic proof of his deep xenophobic disgust.

The widespread lack of conviction endemic to a supposedly transcendental hierarchy is Suzuki’s way of communicating that the military elite, in reality, was more self-interested than fanatical: the group dynamic and the corruption of power superseded the ultranationalist ideal. In contrast, the ‘purely’ fanatical Mikami is one of those faithful (rather than thoughtful) souls who would serve a code of conduct at

all costs, rather than exploit it for his own gain. But Suzuki is also unsparing in his critical attitude towards a character who, awaiting an unjust execution in his cell, continues to recite over and over again the military Field Service Code (itself derived by Yamamoto Tsunetomo's Edo-period treatise on suicide for the samurai): 'Never let wine or women distract from thoughts of death.' In keeping with these (common) misogynistic sentiments of wartime, Mikami's execrable treatment of his lover, Harumi, is the ultimate condemnation of his patriotism, accomplishing a remarkably proto-feminist critique on the part of the filmmakers. As Mikami prepares to commit a useless suicide, Harumi berates him for an ideology that she has long since discarded. But at the last moment, she is unable to resist her romantic attachment and joins him in a double suicide. What are the roots of this perhaps equally fanatical attachment?

In *Shunpuden*, Harumi goes from one bad relationship—the sexual pleasure of domination by the abusive adjutant—to another, when she falls in love with the quietly fanatical Mikami. The central narrative question of the film is why Harumi stays with Mikami literally to the bitter end. At one crucial point, Harumi abandons the invalid Mikami as the PLA are leaving the battlefield and the couple are threatened with starvation or worse. In a slow, extreme long shot, Harumi makes it halfway across a vast, muddy plain, only to collapse in despair. An abrupt ellipsis sees her returned to Mikami's bedside, unable to leave him behind.

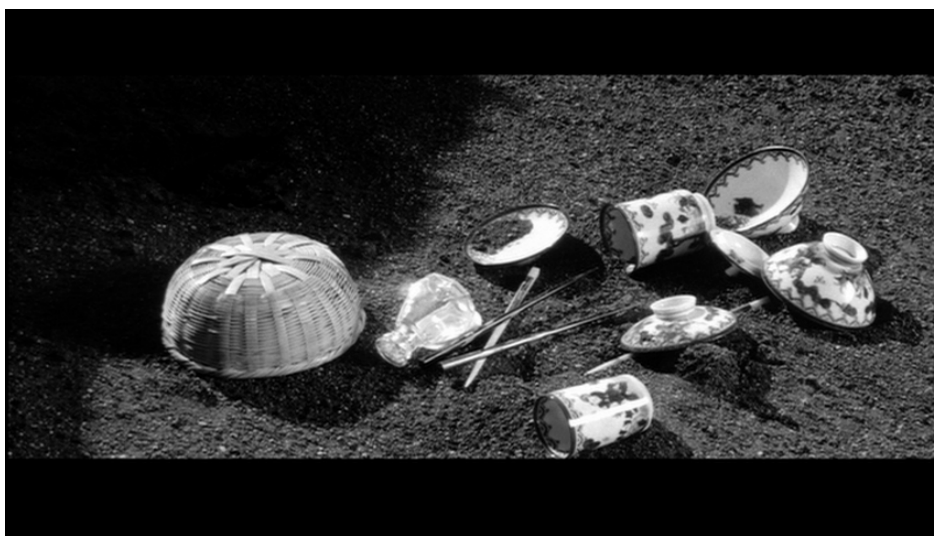


6:4 The Hell of Romantic Attachment: Harumi runs across the vast plain towards the departing PLA troops (and freedom), only to finally collapse in the mud: she cannot bring herself to leave the patriotic Mikami behind

Harumi's double suicide is shocking not because of its historical context, and not because its post-war cinematic context, in which suicide as a narrative resolution was nearly as common as it was in the Edo plays of Chikamatsu, but because Harumi is a rebellious and uncompromising heroine who rejects the pull of patriarchal values. The suicide is tantamount to a submission of her individuality to an ancient cultural norm, a terrible sacrifice made for the unappreciative Mikami. But Harumi's fate is prefigured in an earlier scene where another prostitute, Sachiko (Imai Kazuko), returns to the base after the failure of an arranged marriage with a man who turned out to be violently retarded. Speaking of her hopes for the marriage earlier, Sachiko had said that their pimp 'doesn't understand how important marriage is to us prostitutes.' As she returns in bitter disillusionment, her suitcase falls open, revealing the dishes and cutlery that



she had lovingly cared for across half a continent. The dishes drop into the mud, an example of Suzuki's visual poetry at its most adroit, and unusual in its sincere and devastating emotive potential.



6:5 The Myth of Domesticity: Sachiko's meagre dishes fallen in the mud along with her hopes of 'a decent marriage'

It is Harumi alone who stoops to pick up the dishes, and in doing so the perspicacious viewer may predict that she is similarly doomed. Just as Mikami is in thrall to imperial idealism, Harumi is in thrall to a group ideology which, in Suzuki's version, is a kind of sentimental romanticism about marriage. In a moment of absurd romantic fantasy, Harumi finds the wounded Mikami in the trench and carefully lies down beside him, posing as if to create the *mise-en-scène* for a standard portrait photo of a young married couple. This romanticism is of a kind nourished by mass circulation women's magazines and textbooks alike during the Taishō era.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Silverberg discusses the domestic and imperial emphasis of even a comparatively modern, Westernized magazine such as *Shufu no tomo* (*Housewife's Friend*): *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense* (Berkeley 2006), pp. 143-153.



6:6 Portrait of A Marriage? Harumi 'composes herself' beside Mikami's unconscious body in the trenches

As the case of Sachiko reveals, these diasporic prostitutes cling to a factually unlikely hope of marriage and economic security with a Japanese man in China. The fact that they do not consider the Chinese farmers for marriage acknowledges the limited world-view of these otherwise sympathetic characters. Sacrifice—of a woman for her lover—was as much a part of Taishō sentimental melodrama as it was a part of the wartime patriotic ethos for men, and Suzuki considers the romanticism of the prostitutes to be, tragically, just as destructive. Harumi is turned from the path of rebellion out of her desperate love for Mikami, who in 96 minutes of the film neither says nor does a single decent thing for her, and on several occasions reveals the shallowness of his own affections. But her romantic attachment is equally as ingrained as Mikami's chauvinistic patriotism. However, there remains at least some hope for the prostitutes that survive Harumi. Led by a Korean elder (Hatsui Kotoe), they decide, in the final scene of the film, that

survival is the only important thing, after all. Ironically they come to the opposite conclusion of Borneo Maya, who prepares for death when survival means complicity. Suzuki holds out both as legitimate—and subversive—within the respective circumstances of war and peace. There is an acute historical situation to the filmmaker's ethical analysis. There are no transcendent solutions to the universal reality of corruption, subjugation, and death.

The group ethics of the female gang of *Nikutai no mon* are tested by the highly ambiguous character of Machiko, a kimono-clad and highly traditional prostitute who is savagely beaten by the other girls for sleeping with a married commuter businessman who reminds her of her late husband. Machiko is creatively invested in myths of romance and domesticity. 'A woman's happiest when she's married,' she sighs, and idealizes the marriage of her parents in a rural Japanese town.

Accompanied by *shamisen* strings on the soundtrack, Machiko (who is under the impression that she is a geisha) intrudes on the *mise-en-scène* like a ghost from the pre-war past, and also seems to satirize the 1960s 'nostalgia boom' that William Kelly identifies: '...Throughout the 1960s...Japanese culture was...frequently expressed as an exultation of...rural nostalgia. A feverish *furusato būmu* (home village boom) idealized country folk as true exemplars of...Japanese values.'<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Machiko espouses a sort of erotics of monogamy with metaphysical overtones. She believes that the relation between men and woman is principally physical, but finds its highest attainment in marriage. 'You're jealous because I know secrets of the flesh,' she cries

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<sup>29</sup> William W. Kelly, 'Finding a Place in Metropolitan Japan,' in Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History*, p. 194. This cultural development was accompanied by a vast advertising regime aimed at housewives, as discussed in Chapter Four.

as she is beaten, in reference to her previous marriage. I see no indication that the filmmakers are sympathetic to Machiko's bizarre romantic mixage of *furusato*, the geisha, and domestic sexuality. In fact, the opposite may be true. Is not the beating of Machiko a kind of judgment of the character's deluded romanticism? Machiko incarnates a nostalgic myth definitively at odds with the real conditions of post-war culture. She enjoys the fantasy role-play of a submissive 'domestic woman' but even she cannot sustain this charade until the end. In Suzuki's film, her myth appears as a retrograde embrace of the patriarchal status quo, or domestic consumerism, or both.

## II. THE AESTHETICS OF MASOCHISM

### *Violence and Difference*

Satō Tadao, an admirer of *Shunpuden*, remembers that 'the majority of film critics were puzzled....Why was this outrageous film made when we already have [the 1948 version] *Escape at Dawn*?...Critics saw it as exploiting the erotic to sell tickets...they viewed it as a dirty film.'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the reviewer for *Kinema junpō* wrote that *Shunpuden* '...makes us perceive the degradation of Japanese cinema.'<sup>31</sup> Such reviewers did not care that the Taniguchi film, because of Occupation censorship and prevailing middle class taste, was so bowdlerized that it denied the existence of 'comfort women' (prostitutes) on the war front, thus gutting the purpose of Tamura's original. Whatever the anti-war intentions of Taniguchi and Kurosawa, the 1948 film is a victim of history and today represents the whitewashing of a

<sup>30</sup> interview conducted for the 2005 Criterion collection DVD.

<sup>31</sup> Iida Kokomi, *Kinema junpō* no. 388 (Early April 1965), p. 87.

national disgrace on the part of a patriarchal media establishment. Although Suzuki's film, under studio pressures of its own, largely skirted the question of the forced prostitution of Chinese women, its representation of sexual violence under fascism, as well as unapologetic female sexuality generally, discomfited critics who did not expect political satire from Nikkatsu 'B' pictures. A critical sleight of hand thus dismissed the *Flesh Trilogy* as exploitative, unworthy of consideration. The *Kinema junpō* reviewer of *Nikutai no mon* took offense at any attempt to 're-present' the post-war sex trade, and condemned the film as one that 'hangs simplemindedly on nudity and cruelty',<sup>32</sup> while Kazuki Ryōsuke wrote that '...the author is enjoying himself...capriciously...as if he were a sadist...'.<sup>33</sup>

Is the Suzuki film sadistic? Instead of reviving debates about the political value of popular exploitation, I want to conduct a specific aesthetic investigation: is it legitimate to call the Suzuki aesthetic 'sadistic,' or something other? Certainly, on-screen gendered violence had been commonplace in hard-boiled, horror, and other 'B' genre films since the mid-1950s. Suzuki, in particular, often invested such moments of violence with enormous visual significance, such as the frequent motif of a woman shot, off-screen, through the breast, her resultant corpse often captured in a lingering, still composition accompanied by non-diegetic stylization.

<sup>32</sup> Review by Ogura Masami, *Kinema junpō* no. 370 (Late July 1964), pp. 80-81.

<sup>33</sup> 'Suzuki Seijun yo, ongaku ni motto aijō wo...' (Suzuki Seijun, Love Music a Little More...), *Eiga hyōron* (Nov. 1964), p. 86.



6:7 The Stylisation of Death: shot in the breast behind a non-diegetic red screen in place of a wall

If Suzuki's films, like other B-pictures, sometimes appear like a catalogue of gendered sadistic acts, does it follow that he presents a sadistic *mise-en-scène*? Satō asserted, to the contrary, that 'Suzuki's best films have the appearance of a masochistic cartoon.'<sup>34</sup>

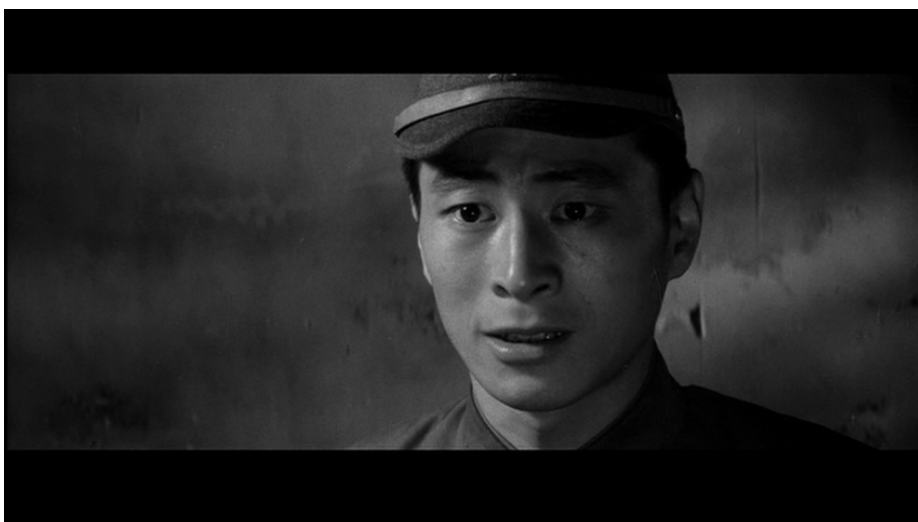
Perhaps the most aesthetically revealing moment of *Shunpuden* comes when Harumi demands physical and emotional love from Mikami. Mikami rebuffs her embraces and throws her off; when she persists, Mikami strikes her hard enough to catapult her out of the doorway. But the strike itself is not shown in a linear fashion. A discontinuous montage ensues: first, there is a long shot of the cold outer courtyard, where Harumi has fallen.

<sup>34</sup> *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, translated by Gregory Barrett, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), p. 225.



6:8 Violence Out-of-Sync, Shot (1): Harumi falls out of the door after Mikami has slapped her

This is followed by Harumi on the ground, turning to look at Mikami, and then what *seems* to be the equally stunned reaction shot of Mikami inside the barn. As it turns out, the latter shot of Mikami is not a reaction shot at all, but a return to the ‘past,’ the moment of the slap several seconds before.



6:9 Violence Out-of-Sync, Shot (2): what seems to be Mikami's reaction shot to his own violence is actually the moment before he slaps Harumi

The next shot is also of the pitiless Mikami as he hits Harumi. We then return to a

close-up of Harumi on the ground as she evidently recalls the moment of violence. She begins to scream in rage and emotional pain, a scream so fierce that Suzuki captures it in slow-motion, causing the scream on the soundtrack to go out-of-sync with the image.



*6:10 Rage Against the System, Shot (5): Harumi reacts to her intolerable entrapment (prostitution or romantic attachment to the contemptuous Mikami): a continuous scream for five shots, with sound and visuals entirely out-of-sync*

She continues her seemingly endless howl in two long shots as the other prostitutes crowd the doorway to jeer at Mikami for mistreating a woman. Yet another close-up of Harumi's scream follows, again out-of-sync; but this time her fury is tinged with concern for the humiliated Mikami.





6:11 The Restoration of Order? Shot (10): The prostitutes jeer at Mikami in retaliation for his violence. When they mock that Harumi prefers the monstrous Adjutant, Harumi is forced to defend her romantic feelings for Mikami: but the formal discontinuity (like Harumi's entrapment) does not cease

In this remarkable sequence, Harumi expresses unconquerable rage when faced with the ‘*Catch-22*’ situation of the Japanese woman in wartime: either prostitution or monogamy-as-submission. Standish (briefly) interprets her scream as that of the archetypal ‘hysterical female’ whose sexuality must be re-contained,<sup>35</sup> but this does not account for the formal and gestural significance of the scene. The scream is so powerful that it shatters the norms of classical cinema. Continuity editing is broken down more severely than in any previous Suzuki film, and the political/ideological efficacy of linear narrative is powerfully, if temporarily, rejected. Classical realism becomes inadequate as a representational system, either to the representation of female subjectivity generally, or to the intolerable situation of marginalized women at this point in history. Discontinuity and non-diegetic *mise-en-scène*, corresponding here to subjectivity, must take the place of realism, in order to allow for minor perspectives and to admit the possibility of critique. This also enables the director to subtly declare his superiority to Taniguchi’s 1948 classical version, then a critical

<sup>35</sup> Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 259.

milestone of realism and ‘humanism’.

In this scene, there is no reason at all to equate Suzuki’s avant-garde representation of violence with cinematic sadism, which tends by definition to take on an aesthetic of control and subjugation. By contrast, here is a form that, while spinning out of control, becomes highly empathetic to the female protagonist and indeed represents her memory. As Standish points out,<sup>36</sup> this form is related to a masochistic context. Suzuki’s editing has defied the progress of time in order to *suspend* the suffering cry of Harumi through duration, over-cranking (slow motion), and repetition. Harumi has escaped from prostitution to the Adjutant only to find herself in another chauvinist ‘double-bind’ (romantic commitment=disappointment and abuse) from which she cannot escape. In the final close-up, showing Harumi’s sympathy for her tormentor, her rage against entrapment (the rebellious aspect of Suzuki’s aesthetic) is curtailed by a negative realization. The moment of the ‘break’ has passed. Like all self-destructive or unrequited attractions, this is a hell from which Harumi does not entirely want to escape. The Suzuki aesthetic negates the intolerable status quo, but also negates the fantasy of easy escape from a prevalent psycho-social dynamic of sadomasochism.

### *The Whipping Scene: Masochism as Social Allegory*

One particular scene in *Nikutai no mon*, in which Borneo Maya is stripped and beaten by the prostitutes, excited critical charges of sadism and ‘masturbatory’

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<sup>36</sup> Standish, p. 259.

exploitation.<sup>37</sup> I shall argue, however, that the scene expresses the essence of what Gilles Deleuze and Gaylyn Studlar have identified as a masochistic aesthetic in art.<sup>38</sup> For clarity's sake, however, I shall divide my discussion of the masochistic aesthetic into two parts. The first concerns masochism as a social allegory expressed largely through narrative arrangement and character interaction. Here, a masochistic dynamic assumed to be present within the family is projected as a relation towards the social order. Secondly, I will treat Suzuki's masochism as a quality of *mise-en-scène*, a visual rhetoric marked by such qualities as ironic distance and multi-sensory excess.

In order to appreciate Suzuki's masochism as social allegory, we must briefly mention masochism as a psychological condition. Studlar draws on Deleuze's theory of masochism as a process fundamentally independent, *contra* Freud, from sadism.<sup>39</sup> Studlar's account of masochistic development has been challenged,<sup>40</sup> but as Deleuze reminds us, masochism and sadism are not just clinical conditions but *cultural/literary* tropes that have a variable relation to the clinical.<sup>41</sup> Just as art is not limited to representing reality, so the artist's interpretation (or misreading) of inter-subjective relations according to a rhetorical/conceptual schema of masochism need not be limited to that which is clinically accurate; it might, for example, conflate male and female masochism. Studlar's work is therefore useful to our purpose insofar as it

<sup>37</sup> Ogawa Yoshiyuki, *Kinema junpō* no. 370 (Late July 1964), p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> The very iconography of 'hanging' or suspension in erotic narrative specifies a masochistic scenario, as Deleuze shows in relation to Von Masoch's fiction: 'The masochistic rites of torture and suffering imply actual physical suspension (the hero is hung up, crucified, or suspended): Deleuze, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, translated by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pp. 14, 32, 37-46.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine Constable, in her book *Thinking in Images* (London: BFI, 2005), pp. 57-58, 63, has effectively criticized the account of masochism that Studlar presents in her influential work *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), insofar as it relates to early female psychological development. I bracket these concerns here and concentrate on Studlar's account of male masochism as it relates the masochistic contours of a male authorial signature.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, pp. 13-16, 34-35.

applies Deleuze's analysis of masochism as a *literary* language to cinematic *mise-en-scène*, and in doing so helps to identify a (male) masochistic dynamic at work in Suzuki's films.

Studlar argues that fetishistic masochism derives from pre-Oedipal sexuality and the infant child's separation from the mother, who is 'simultaneously a love object and controlling agent.'<sup>42</sup> An impossible search for reunion with an ideal mother and 'wholeness' carries on in adult life in the form of masochism and the fetishes associated with it. Drawing on the psychologist Theodor Reik, she further argues that when the child enters the Oedipal stage, there is a 'price' that must be paid 'for the mature genital sexuality that is at odds with infant desire' and the pleasure principle. The 'price' is that pleasure must be achieved by 'another road,' through pain. Because of the punishing condemnation of the super-ego (and often patriarchy), the masochist 'submits voluntarily to punishment, suffering and humiliation, and thus has defiantly purchased the right to enjoy gratification denied before.'<sup>43</sup>

The quote above, though it applies to the psychology of the family, may also serve as the formula for Suzuki's masochism on the level of social representation.<sup>44</sup> Masochism is unavoidable as the individual's relation to an oppressive society that he or she has internalized. Hence, all forms of resistance must also work through masochism. The Suzuki protagonist submits voluntarily to society's (inescapable)

<sup>42</sup> Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 14-15.

<sup>43</sup> Theodor Reik, *Masochism and Modern Man*, quoted in Studlar, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that in Suzuki's hard-boiled and gangster films there is usually no sign of a mother—an example of the structured absence of semiotic film theory—but a plethora of corrupt, evil patriarchs who represent society. This is a rather common *topos* of Hollywood *film noir* and its descendents: see William B. Covey, 'Pères Fatales: Character and Style in Postmodern Neo-Noir,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 28:1 (2010), pp. 41-52.

punishment, not out of fear, but in order to purchase *the right of rebellion*.

But why, then, is rebellion in Suzuki so rarely successful? Perhaps it is necessary to distinguish between variant modes of resistance, i.e. variant modes of masochism as a social relation. The suicide of Mikami, engaged in a 'passive' rebellion against his abusive 'father' (the Adjutant), is, like samurai *seppuku*, a useless symbolic protest: the rebel gains nothing and the oppressor is strengthened. Suzuki's heroine Maya, however, enacts a far less orthodox masochistic 'resistance': her goal is to rebel—and survive to enjoy the fruits of rebellion.

The behaviour of Maya in the whipping scene of *Nikutai no mon* thus demonstrates a crucial difference between Suzuki's aesthetic and the aesthetics of the *roman poruno* (and other *pinku eiga*) that he partially inspired. The latter are structurally defined by sequences in which an 'innocent' female is dominated and sexually violated by a sadistic phallic agent (male or female) who 'instructs' the victim in submissive behaviour. The purpose, ultimately, is to compel obedience to (male) authority, whether through fear of pain or, in the commercial/erotic idiom of these films, by instilling the victim with the sexual pleasure of being dominated. In *pinku eiga*, the victim derives unfettered sexual pleasure from her torturer; the initially 'cold' masochist depends on the sadist to realize her 'true' desires, and this dependence re-inscribes her into the patriarchal order.<sup>45</sup> In this scenario, whatever rebellious political potential may lie in female sexuality is neutralized, while authority symbolically perpetuates the lie that the oppressed derive benefit.

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<sup>45</sup> Brian Moeran, 'The Beauty of Violence: *Jidai-geki*, *yakuza*, and *ero-duction* Films in Japan' in David Riches, ed., *The Anthropology of Violence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 105.

The demonstration of control is also ultimately the purpose of Sen's fascistic punishment of Maya when the latter wilfully sleeps with Ibuki. But Maya refuses to learn her 'lesson'. Seeing society for what it is (venal), Maya accepts punishment/suffering as the *price* or necessary condition of achieving the forbidden (Ibuki). She 'takes' the punishment, first by laughing derisively, then by refusing her captors the satisfaction of a single scream of submission. Afterwards, she proceeds on the path of resistance by rejoining Ibuki. Unlike in *roman poruno*, Maya neither derives sexual pleasure from her torturers nor allows them to have any. Torture is the social cost of a desire that she herself has decided upon. Maya's masochism, far from suppressing a rebellious instinct, serves to justify and encourage rebellion: punishment is the point of no return for the rebel.<sup>46</sup> Rather as Satō writes that, for Suzuki the war veteran, 'it was necessary to discover...a masochistic pleasure in...an experience that shook one's core,'<sup>47</sup> so Maya only discovers her heroism when she becomes a punished outlaw. In this allegory, Maya is the director's diegetic double, the stand-in for an authorial masochism.<sup>48</sup> And if Suzuki/Maya's masochism is not entirely distinct as a psychological process from the 'willing' female victim of *roman poruno* who 'purchases' pleasure from her tormentor, Suzuki is at pains to present it

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze writes of the masochistic heroes of Von Masoch that 'it is as though expiation...were at last to permit the hero what his punishments were previously intended to deny him. Once they have been undergone, punishments and suffering allow the exercise of the evil they once prohibited': *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, p. 39. The evil that Deleuze mentions is the doing of violence (rather than submitting to it), but this is clearly relevant to *Nikutai no mon*, in the libidinal economy of which the prohibited evil is the free exercise of pleasure and sexual intercourse. David Rodowick also argues that at least the male masochist can 'formulate subjectivities that resist patriarchal authority and phallic sexuality' even if through negativity and self-castration: Rodowick, *The Difficulty of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 84-88. Studlar more controversially argues for masochism as representational mode or dynamic that enables female resistance to prevailing patriarchal forms: pp. 7-8, 50-52, 73, 77, 82.

<sup>47</sup> Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema* (Kodansha, 1983), p. 225.

<sup>48</sup> Hasumi writes, of Suzuki's female protagonists as played by Nogawa, that 'perhaps Suzuki refuses to recognize the difference between men and women just like he ignores the season': Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons' in Hasumi and Suzuki, p. 21. Deleuze, pp. 22, 31-33, emphasizes a related, general masochistic disavowal of gender difference.

as differential *politically*,<sup>49</sup> i.e. to treat masochism as an (inevitable) social relation that is not *essentially* gendered and retains at least the possibility of resistance.

In sum, there is a very real sense in which Suzuki's whipping sequence, a scene of exploitation for critics of the film, establishes Maya as Suzuki's quintessential hero. Hasumi argues that in her physical 'vitality,' Nogawa's characters are the equal of Suzuki's male *yakuza*; but this does not go far enough.<sup>50</sup> Undeterred by a neurotic identity crisis in relation to the father, she is by far their superior. Unfortunately, like those other heroes, Maya remains compromised: her (incestuous) investment in heterosexual romance appoints Ibuki as the focus, crux, and goal of her rebellion. When the Alpha Male proves insufficient (in fact, is slaughtered by the pack), Maya's only route of dissent is through negativity: the refusal to survive.

### *Masochistic and Sadistic Rhetorics*

Nevertheless, because Suzuki's critics have pointed to his realizations of gendered violence not as sadistic allegory, but as a sadistic *mise-en-scène*, we therefore need to make a provisional distinction between a sadistic aesthetic and a masochistic one. Studlar has detailed the nature of a masochistic aesthetic in Von Sternberg, proposing a clear distinction between masochistic and sadistic cinematic style. These are distinguished by their respective narrative and visual economies,

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<sup>49</sup> It may be worth reiterating at this point (see fn. 21) the difference between Tamura and Suzuki's respective treatment of the narrative climax, the intercourse between Maya and Ibuki. In Tamura's original the sex is a violent demonstration of Ibuki's domination and Maya's submissive pleasure. Tamura writes, for example, that 'Ibuki knew by intuition that his hatred wouldn't subside until he tortured this sassy girl through and through': translated by Igarashi in his *Bodies of Memory*, p. 59. In Suzuki's version, however, it is a determined Maya who both instigates and demands sex from the (symbolically) near-comatose Ibuki; the director negates Tamura's quasi-sadistic, allegorical utilization of the (submissive) female body. Nor does the sex have such an overwhelming character of violent male domination, although Suzuki recognises that such desires cannot be far from Ibuki's subjectivity: he cannot help mocking the latter's 'Alpha Male' persona by intercutting military footage of rockets with the moment of Ibuki's erection.

<sup>50</sup> Hasumi, 'A World WWithout Seasons' in Hasumi and Suzuki, p. 21.

presentation and ordering of time, and strategies of description. For Studlar, following a Foucauldian critique, the patriarchal aesthetic of De Sade is controlling, quantitative and linear, exacting in its attempt at comprehensiveness and mastery. ‘Sade’s language—demonstrative, imperative, and obscenely descriptive—creates a fantastic world based exclusively on the rule of reason. In this world, the mechanistic negation of Nature dominates in the routine...destruction of female victims.’<sup>51</sup> Sadian discourse is thus a kind of perverse *bildungsroman*, the kind of rationalist constructionism (based on gendered subjugation) that Suzuki has publicly abhorred. ‘The Sadian discourse is denotative, unblinkingly “scientific” in its obscene descriptions....Numbers, not individuals, count...’<sup>52</sup> A suitable example of this aesthetic in Japanese cinema may be easily found in the studio *pinku eiga* of the 1970s:



6:12 Sadism and Sexploitation: in Suzuki Norifumi's satire *Ero shogun to nijūichi nin no aishō/Lustful Shogun and his 91 Concubines* (Tōei 1972), a long shot captures dozens of concubines lined up in a row, tickled and then seemingly violated by serving woman with paintbrushes, on the orders of the shogun.

The blood-spurting sword fight of Nikkatsu's *Otoko no monshō/Gambler's Code*

<sup>51</sup> Studlar, p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Studlar, p. 19.



(Matsuo Akinori, 1966) also obeys a sadistic economy, with every violent ‘penetration’ clearly displayed with a linear and somewhat boring precision.

If sadism benefits from a largely realist, temporally and spatially ordered *mise-en-scène*, the masochistic aesthetic is often oneiric and narratively obscure. Though often involving eroticized violence, Studlar argues that ‘the temporal core of masochism is the suspension of gratification manifested in games of waiting, surprise gestures of tenderness and cruelty, and masquerades that...delay consummation.’<sup>53</sup> The erotics of masochism ‘obsessively recreate the movement between concealment and revelation, disappearance and appearance...’<sup>54</sup> Its visual and narrative account of the sexual is therefore not only in the fashion of a masquerade, but often formally and metaphorically full of gaps and wholes. Because of these factors, the encounter with the nude body is usually masked in some way.<sup>55</sup> a crucial aesthetic of Suzuki’s *Flesh Trilogy*. Studlar’s account of the erotic *mise-en-scène* of Sternberg is thus remarkable for the way in which it anticipates so many aspects of the mature Suzuki style.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Whipping Scene: Spectatorship and Masochism as Visual Style*

Studlar is persuasive in defining the masochistic aesthetic in the cinema as an aesthetic that re-emphasises, through various formal means, the masochism that has always been an important aspect of viewership. She argues that, in contrast to the sadistic desire for intervention and penetration of the object by the subject, cinema spectatorship is masochistic in that ‘it depends on separation to guarantee a

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<sup>53</sup> Studlar, pp. 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> Studlar, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze writes of Sacher von Masoch’s fiction that ‘we never see the naked body of the woman torturer; it is always wrapped in furs. The body of the victim remains in a strange state of indeterminacy except where it receives the blows’: *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, translated by Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. <sup>26</sup> cf. Studlar, pp. 20, 70.

<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that in Japan, Von Sternberg was perhaps the most influential and revered of Hollywood directors: Richie and Anderson, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, rev. ed. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), p. 247; Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 32.

pain/pleasure structure.<sup>57</sup> The passive, sometimes overwhelming submission to cinematic pleasure only works, paradoxically, on the condition of an unbridgeable separation and distance. Similarly, Suzuki's definitive assertion of the illusory, not the representational, capacity of the cinema is predicated on the distance between screen and viewer. Perhaps the theory of masochism may function as a means for understanding a fundamental alternation in Suzuki's films between critical distance and irony, on the one hand, and on the other an awe-struck absorption in aestheticised spectacles of light, colour, and eroticism.

Indeed, Studlar's account of spectatorship as a submission to a powerful cinematic 'other' carries the possibility of irony, which is not normally understood as commensurable with 'submission' to an artwork. For Studlar, irony consists of 'self-awareness' even in moments of extreme passion.<sup>58</sup> The individual stands outside of himself, at a distance, as it were, even while suffering pain. 'Ironic humour qualifies the melodramatic absurdity of masochistic posturing.'<sup>59</sup> Studlar's account of irony, then, not only helps us to understand the dialectic of (specular) involvement and ironic withdrawal in Suzuki, but also generally explains a tendency towards the overtly artificial in his films.

In the aesthetic economy of masochism, narrative events are 'related paratactically rather than causally as antecedent/precedent rather than cause/effect.'<sup>60</sup> The masochistic style, for Studlar, also emphasises contiguity over continuity: that is to say, rather than relying on the distribution of images according to classical

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<sup>57</sup> Studlar, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Studlar, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Studlar, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Studlar, p. 116.

continuity, it exploits the graphic match and other devices of juxtaposition based on sensory perception.<sup>61</sup> Studlar calls this *synesthesia*, the substitution of sensory elements for one another. Since *synesthesia* ‘permits...the forging ‘of new multi-sensory meanings,’ this cinematic style tends toward an overload of sensory excess.<sup>62</sup> Narrative is ‘dissipated into spectacle’.<sup>63</sup> Of course, such a departure from classical narrative is only partial: the continuity system still basically functions as the engine of narrative, but it is also frequently and unconventionally disrupted, as in Suzuki’s loose, barely coherent narratives.

Suzuki’s experimentation, particularly in seeking a ‘visual attitude’ towards the representation of violence, eros, and the relation between them, is strikingly analogous to Studlar’s theory. The only moment in *Shunpuden*, for example, which reveals the nude body of the heroine is a moment from Harumi’s dream. In an extreme long shot, she casts off her clothes and runs free through the Chinese courtyard, retreating swiftly from the camera into a cloudy background as a symbol of freedom.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Studlar, p. 136.

<sup>63</sup> Studlar, p. 131.



6:13 Nakedness as Freedom: Harumi dreams of running free through an old Chinese courtyard

In an earlier, potentially lascivious moment, a prostitute is forced to strip off her clothes and submit to a cold bath. However, Suzuki depicts her nudity in the background of an extreme long shot, in front of a vast desert plain and at the back of two recessed archways, while in the middle ground, gossiping prostitutes in their kimonos move about and obscure our view of the nude.



6:14 Nakedness as Art: The female nude in the extreme background of an artfully composed, multi-planar social tableau

This ‘promise and refusal’ of voyeurism is somewhat ludic, recalling the games of delay, revelation, and concealment by which Studlar characterizes masochism. In the Suzuki aesthetic, however, the game goes on forever: there is no consummation, only the endless erotic play of art. In that respect, as in *Yajū no seishun*, the nude is integrated as only one compositional element of a multi-faceted canvas of extreme depth, encompassing landscape, architecture, costume, and an overtly ‘posed’ and painterly framing.<sup>64</sup>

In both cases, the long shot and the extreme distance from the eroticized body are the most notable compositional elements. These qualities are brought to a logical conclusion in the whipping scene at the climax of *Nikutai no mon*. Maya’s nude and hanging body is portrayed in a series of three long shots, interspersed by close-ups as she endures the blows (which are largely off-screen). These include three contiguous close-ups of Maya from different angles as she is whipped, the sound of which is not presented according to a plausible rhythm, but all at once, like an avalanche.

The final long shot captures Kimura’s magnificent expressionist set of the bombed-out building interior, punctuated by strange (possibly non-diegetic) coloured windows resembling stained glass. Within this composition, Maya’s body hangs from the visible ceiling just off-centre. Carefully placed shadows conceal her genitalia, buttocks and (usually) breasts. A non-diegetic translucent masking effect, which

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<sup>64</sup> One of Suzuki’s early champions, Kajiware Ryūji, felt that Suzuki’s representation of the nude in *Yajū no seishun* was unlike anything he had seen in Japanese cinema; the reason for this newness, he suggested, was that Suzuki’s aesthetic was foreign to the modern ‘Japanese mind which thinks too easily of a sexually-desiring, lascivious eroticism called “nudity”’. Kajiware opined that earlier filmmakers had been shy about such interesting compositions because they ‘feared misunderstanding’: Kajiware, ‘Suzuki Seijun no bi,’ (*Eiga hyōron*, July 1964), in Motomura Shūji, ed, *Suzuki Seijun sōtokushū*. (Tokyo, Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001), p. 121.

grows thicker and more greenish in hue in each of the three long shots, covers the frame on both sides of Maya's hanging body.



6:15 Masochism and Distance: D.P. Shigeyoshi Mine's 'flattened depth' barely conceals the extreme distance between the camera and the hazily-glimpsed nude body of Maya



6:16 Masochism and Concealment: carefully placed shadows and non-diegetic green 'masking' foreground the lack of visibility

The mask has the effect of emphasizing Maya's body (the only unmasked part of the frame), but because of the camera's distance and the covering shadows, the mask

ironically emphasizes what *cannot be seen*: it fetishizes not exposure, but the process of masking and concealment itself.

In short, the scene displays every aspect of Studlar's masochistic aesthetic: the play of concealment; overt (non-diegetic) artifice; a montage based not on cause and effect but on the escalation of impression and sensation, a visual and narrative confusion of pleasure and pain. Most importantly, through the self-reflexive play of 'masking', Suzuki reemphasises the fundamental separation of the viewer and the cinema screen which, for Studlar, is the basis of (masochistic) pleasure, and which, indeed, makes the unique fascination of the cinema possible. Where the sadistic aesthetic would attempt to penetrate this distance, revelling in visual clarity and the voyeuristic capacity of the apparatus, Suzuki turns to the opposite. Perfecting his mirror scene from *Yajū no seishun*, he celebrates the polymorphic capacity of the film image to render eros abstract, to convert the voyeurism of the body into the fascination of a diffusive and non-representational erotic *mise-en-scène*: in other words, into art. Of the many erotic art films of 1960s Japan, *The Flesh Trilogy*, by arguing the necessity of this transmutation, seems to me the most direct in its aesthetic and political pronouncement on cinema's confrontation with the body.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For the sake of contrast, I offer the following brief summary of strategies of representation of sexuality in the contemporary films (between 1964-1966) of the *nuberu bagu*. In 1965, Ōshima's pronounced lack of clarity on the use of gender in political allegory is echoed by the director's own indecisive observation that 'I somehow seem to be on a path whose purpose is to make a model of a crime of conviction....but recently...I would like to portray demonic criminals—people who recognize an impulse to commit crimes but don't understand it.' Ōshima, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 109. In each film of the period, for instance *Hakuchū no tōrima/Violence at Noon*, the 'crime' that Ōshima speculates about representing, potentially, as a political 'model' involves the rape and sometimes murder of female victims. Satō aptly summarizes that such films 'became an attempt to liberate the self from the deformity [of psychological repression] through sudden violent acts,' aimed, of course, at women: *Currents of Japanese Cinema*, p. 230. The films are thus perennially problematic for both feminist and political theory: cf. Maureen Turim's balanced but inconclusive treatment of gendered violence in Ōshima: Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 246-268. On the contemporary films of Shinoda, Satō, p. 232, correctly observes that 'he portrays men and women who, by their own acts, create a situation in which the only way they

It is indubitable that violence against woman, often mandated by Nikkatsu scripts that Suzuki did not choose, is sometimes represented as erotic spectacle. However, it is also clear from the example above, informed by Studlar's account of masochistic irony, that this is a 'spectacle' that acts like a modernist canvas, allowing, indeed insisting, on a critical perspective. The reality of sexual and gendered violence in Japanese society, especially in the period films of the *Flesh Trilogy*, is explicitly invested with masochistic visual significance because that is essential to the director's political view, which was ignored by the critics of the day. At the same time, examples above suggest that the 'image' of violence—usually off-screen and as part of a complex masochistic fantasy—is not as important a component as the figure of the female nude in the director's creation of an anti-representational erotic art. To clarify this, one might say that in Suzuki's political aesthetic, gendered violence must *not* be represented either as realism or as melodrama; it is far preferable to recast screen violence, and the pleasure of the (heterosexual) male spectator, as a graphical abstraction, a problematic work of art suffused with masochistic irony. At the risk of seeming blasé (a consequence of the director's firsthand experience of violence as absurd), such abstraction recuperates violent representations, not as figures of an ideological drama, but as figures of (ironic and critical) discourse.

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can enjoy sexual pleasure is to pay for it with their lives...this is pure aestheticism.' (e.g. *Kawaita hana/Pale flower*, 1963-4). As for Yoshida, Standish argues that his representation of sexuality places sex outside of time—conceived as an oppressive social construct—as an existentialist authentication of being: Standish, *Politics, Porn, and Protest*, pp. 56-57. This is precisely what Suzuki denies. cf. Standish's *New History of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 257-266, for a critical overview of the sexual politics of the *nuberu bagu*, although I have disagreed with its reading of *The Flesh Trilogy*.



*Concluding Remarks: Kawachi karumen's Rebellion without Masochism?*

Although I have posited masochism in Suzuki's films as the structure of relation of the individual to society, *Kawachi karumen* (1966) appears as a partially successful attempt to imagine female resistance from without a masochistic scenario. The director's collaboration with a younger *kumi*, developments towards activism in the political climate, and the film's contemporary setting may have all contributed to this. In the film, every level of patriarchal society, from homeless drifters to *zaibatsu* industrialists to promiscuous *yamabushi* (a mountain holy man whose presence is an allegorical indictment of the pre-war episteme), attempts to subjugate Nogawa's robust heroine, but ultimately fail. Rape and an intolerable family situation brings Tsuyuko from rural Kawachi to the Club Dada in Osaka—the setting of a marvellous satire of crass *sarariman* culture—where she becomes a hostess (and *not*, for once, a prostitute). As she wades through a succession of professional and sexual relationships, Tsuyuko learns to participate in Osaka's libidinal economy only enough to make a living and flourish. The question is whether she will be corrupted, i.e. whether she will be fixed as a commodity (as a kept mistress, fashion model, or porn actress) or whether, on the other hand, she will join the ranks of the exploiters.



6:17 Pornography's Threat in a Media Regime: on a porn set, non-diegetic flats resembling klieg lights literally close in on the heroine

Despite the temptations of money and fame and a romantic/nostalgic attachment to her worthless small town sweetheart (Wada Kōji), she manages to avoid these pitfalls.<sup>66</sup> In the end, she rejects—seemingly out of mere strength of character—all relations of dependency, even, in the end, that of the heterosexual couple, which here is depicted as profoundly unstable. In this, Tsuyuko is stronger than her pre-war counterparts.

Tsuyu returns to Kawachi as a rich woman, but when she finds that the *yamabushi* has seduced her younger sister, she lures him to a waterfall and pushes him in. Tsuyu is haunted by this deed; but as she was haunted by this malevolent patriarch in life, what is lost? Tsuyu's actions could not be more justified. The studio removed Suzuki's ambiguous climax to the film, in which Tsuyu is, or imagines she is, sexually assaulted by the *yamabushi's* ghost. This cut may have been fortuitous: as it

<sup>66</sup> Nakahira Kō's earlier *Getsuyōbi no Yuka/Monday Girl* (1964) should be mentioned in comparison, as it is an extremely similar Nikkatsu film, even more indebted to the French *nouvelle vague*, about a sexually liberated, young urban socialite who ends up murdering a patriarch. However, in Nakahira's version the protagonist's sexuality and serial affairs is presented as a problem, in fact a neurotic pathology, thus revealing a basically patriarchal viewpoint. By contrast, apart from humorous commentary on her provincial assumptions, Suzuki's film is entirely non-judgmental of his protagonist's sexual life; perhaps more importantly, the character and subjectivity of his female protagonist is not reduced to nor wholly determined by sexuality.

stands now, *Kawachi karumen* appears remarkably like proto-feminist empowerment, with Tsuyu's violent resistance metonymic for the militant activism that would soon preoccupy Japan's students and the *nuberu bagu* as well. However, we might also consider Suzuki's more pessimistic version as expressing that there is ultimately no such thing as 'successful' murder. Tsuyu is able to save her own family through violence, but other women may not be in a position to do so without reprisal. Lacking a political consciousness, Tsuyu's resistance does not change society—hence the returning ghost of patriarchy. Despite its provocative exploration of sexual politics, then, *Kawachi karumen* is ultimately *not* a political discourse. It is a semi-comic fantasy (not unlike screwball) of success against the odds. Nevertheless, it is Tsuyu's non-conformist survival, through a sense of self-worth that shines through The Flesh Trilogy as a ray of potentiality.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: BREAKING POINT: THE *VIOLENCE TRILOGY* (1966-1967)

### INTRODUCTION: THE VIOLENCE TRILOGY AND THE SUZUKI DIFFERENCE

This chapter shall assert that the consecutive films *Tokyo nagaremono/Tokyo Drifter*, *Kenka erejii*, and *Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill* (1966-67) form a ‘Trilogy of Violence’ or better, to use the title of the middle film, an *Elegy for Violence*. All three films address the same topic: the foundational role of violence in the formation of Japanese masculinity. This ‘elegy’ for violence, therefore, is a coded elegy for masculinity. The dissolution of pre-war, quasi-traditional concepts of masculinity is perhaps the dominant theme that cuts across Suzuki’s career apart from formal and aesthetic investigations.

Of course, the term ‘elegy’ must be understood primarily as ironic. These three films present ‘case studies’ of men whose unwavering devotion to an imagined code of masculine conduct spells disaster for themselves and their communities. For Suzuki, Japanese culture hypocritically encourages and enables this kind of fanaticism at every turn, while ultimately suppressing it in the name of social order.

The trilogy also contains some of Suzuki’s most negative reflections on genre and popular cinema. While *Tokyo nagaremono* vigorously pulls down the formal structures and discourses of the *yakuza* and *akushon* genres (as they had been understood before 1966), Suzuki also holds out the possibility of a modernist, playful, formal approach to the material which brings spectacle and violence to the cinema without reproducing the conventional ideology that seeks to justify and naturalize such violence in the service of patriarchy.

The ‘Violence’ films have a formal consistency, amounting almost to a

declaration of ‘The Suzuki Style,’ which set them apart from earlier exercises. In particular, the use of discontinuity editing becomes as essential and consistent in this Violence Trilogy as it had been exceptional in the *yakuza* sequence. The discontinuity effects of *Shunpuden* (1965)—the use of sound/image disjunction and non-diegetic graphic effects—are here multiplied. There are further structural similarities between these three films, including a strategic tripartite structure that emphasises an accelerating pattern of repetition. Altogether, The Violence Trilogy sees the director reaching that point of stylistic maturation which I have called ‘The Suzuki Difference.’

In using terms such as ‘stylistic maturity,’ however, I run the risk of indulging in a teleological or ‘progressive’ reading of a directorial career which, after all, has multiple points of historical and aesthetic interest. I propose to forestall such an objection, firstly, by reasserting that even academic film scholarship takes a major role in judging, for a varied audience of readers, which films are worth viewing and reviewing. Critical judgment can never be entirely separated from analysis. This being said, my assertion of a ‘Suzuki Difference’ is not *primarily* an aesthetic question of whether a deconstructive experiment like *Tokyo nagaremono* is in some sense ‘superior’ to a taut, dynamic hard-boiled thriller like *Ankokugai no bijo* (1958). I merely assert that there *is* a stylistic difference between those earlier films and the films of The Violence Trilogy, though often that difference is as much a question of quantitative intensity as it is of qualitative change. The exploration, definition, and significance of that *difference* is the purpose of this present study. I aim to trace a development in a certain direction towards what I call, in retrospect, the ‘Suzuki Style,’ at its most radical point of divergence, or active differentiation, from Japanese film practice, especially in the context of studio genre. Hence, ‘The Suzuki

Difference.’

Established film critics recognized implicitly that there was indeed a ‘difference’ to Suzuki’s films of 1966-7. Up to this point, and with the exception of *Eiga hyōron*, Suzuki was one of the most critically ignored of 1960s directors. The critic Yamaguchi Tetsu admitted that although he loved *Kenka erejii*, he had not bothered to see many of Suzuki’s previous films.<sup>1</sup> *Tokyo nagaremono* was widely but negatively reviewed by the major magazines, more as a Watari Tetsuya vehicle than as a director’s film, its stylistic eccentricities duly noted by an uncomprehending establishment.<sup>2</sup> *Kenka erejii*, however, had the honour of having its screenplay published in *Kinema junpō*.<sup>3</sup> With this film, Suzuki found himself on the critical map in a way that had eluded him even after the commercial success of *Nikutai no mon* (1964).

## I. TOKYO NAGAREMONO AS REFLEXIVE AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

### *Tokyo nagaremono in Context*

My analysis of *Tokyo nagaremono* in this chapter focuses on Suzuki’s use of four distinct representational and critical strategies, namely, (1) discontinuous editing; (2) iconic discourse; (3) the representation of masculinity; and (4) the motif of surface and depth in the representation of post-war Tokyo.

*Tokyo nagaremono* began life inauspiciously as a *kayō eiga* (pop song film), a movie meant to cash in on a popular tune. This was common practice at Nikkatsu, as the title song to virtually every star vehicle was released as a record. In this case, Nikkatsu took the music from an existing popular ballad and rewrote the lyrics and

<sup>1</sup> Yamaguchi, *Eiga hyōron* (Feb. 1967) in Motomura Shūji, ed. *Suzuki Seijun: sōtokushū* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 2001), pp. 131-2.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Isoyama Hiroshi, *Kinema junpō* no. 415 (May 1966), p. 62; Ishigami Mitsutoshi, ‘*Tokyo nagaremono igo he*’ (After *Tokyo Drifter*), *Eiga hyōron* (August 1966), in Motomura, ed., *Seijun Suzuki sōtokushū*, pp. 130-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Kinema junpō* no. 428 (Dec. 1966), pp. 107-126.

arrangement to suit a male singer, ideally one of their *akushon* stars.<sup>4</sup> The movie script was then written by Nikkatsu stalwart Kawauchi Kōhan on the basis of the song lyrics before the project was handed over to the director. Nikkatsu marked *Tokyo nagaremono* as the film with which to make a star of Watari Tetsuya, a young contract player with a few supporting roles to his name. Nikkatsu hoped to re-establish the star power, particularly over female viewers, of Kobayashi Akira by reinventing Kobayashi's *Wataridori/Wanderer* (1959-1962) and *Nagaremono/Drifter* series (1960-61). The film was meant to be the first of a new *Nagaremono* series.

As the *Wataridori* series is subject to both satire and revision in Suzuki's film, it is important to understand its character. It is one of the more notorious examples, in the Japanese cinema, of wholesale borrowing from Hollywood, with little attempt to ground the product in a familiar Japanese idiom. Though the stories were set in contemporary Japan and featured pickup trucks, greedy land developers and the like, Kobayashi rode a horse, fought with a bullwhip, and dressed in a cowboy hat, boots, and 'tasseled' leather shirt.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, eds., *Sei/jun/ei/ga*, p. 274.

<sup>5</sup> The photograph below is a publicity still for the film *Daisōgen no wataridori/Plains Wanderer*, reproduced from Mark Schilling's book *No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2009), p. 48.



7:1 The Frontier as Fashion (1): Kobayashi Akira as a Japanese pop singer/lead in Western cowboy dress in the *Wataridori* series (1959-1962)

His costume may well be a direct recreation of Montgomery Clift's star-making outfit from *Red River* (1948).<sup>6</sup>



7:2 Frontier as Fashion (2): Montgomery Clift's stylized 'Frontier Youth' persona in *Red River* (released 1948)

Although the stories were nominally specific about their time and place—the supposed 'frontier wildlands' of Shikoku and Hokkaido<sup>7</sup>—this hardly explained the

<sup>6</sup> This production still below appears in Stephen Cohan's *Masked Men* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997), p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana



diegetic non-sequitar of Kobayashi's Americanised appearance and style of fighting. The fashion and action codes of the films are purely iconographic, the fetishistic and exotic poster images of a commercial multi-media operation at work beyond the diegesis in the form of songs, magazines, etc. The operation is similar to what Masumura satirizes in his *Kyōjin to gangu* (Daiei 1958) in which candy is advertised to children through men in spacesuits and giant European wrestlers outfitted vaguely like cavemen. The novelty was the appeal, but this in turn determined the ephemeral nature of the *Wataridori* sub-genre. Kobayashi's Westernized fashion statement, showcased in easily digestible, escapist action pieces, was lucrative but short-lived.

Nevertheless, *Wataridori* had an influence on the Nikkatsu 'house style.' With their dependence on artificial 'cinematic' landscapes and iconography accepted by audiences as conventional based on previous Hollywood *and* Japanese pictures, the series gave rise to Nikkatsu's *mukokuseki* (borderless) action picture aesthetic. Indeed, the absurdity of these films have led to the somewhat misleading notion that *most* of Nikkatsu's action pictures, because they were often set in such liminal spaces as harbours, dockyards, and Westernised Ginza bars, were also *mukokuseki*, that is, vague and disingenuous as to their location and social context.<sup>8</sup> Much of the facetious tone of *Tokyo nagaremono* can be explained as an acknowledgment of the absurdity of the *mukokuseki* formula, one that exploits that artificiality of the *Wataridori* series in order to dissociate spectacle from ideology, presenting a self-reflexive discourse on cinematic falsity.

Suzuki began by rewriting the script, deciding for himself (in collaboration with Kimura Takeo) where and how the protagonist would drift. As is clear from the

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Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 68-69; cf. Watanabe Takenobu, *Nikkatsu akushon no kareina sekai 1954-1962* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1981), pp. 110-123.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Suzuki in Shilling, *The Yakuza Book* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), pp. 98-99, an example of this mis-definition even amongst the filmmakers themselves. Although Suzuki argues that the films, viewed as a genre, were theoretically and functionally interchangeable as to setting and time, nevertheless most of the individual films specify their settings.

finished film, however, Watari's character is not really a drifter by temperament or profession; and the film, despite an important, symbolic interlude in snowy Yamagata, is largely set within and principally about Tokyo itself.

Suzuki remembers being 'severely scolded' by Nikkatsu for the finished product, as the studio claimed that Watari was not shown to best advantage and could not be marketed on the basis of such a film.<sup>9</sup> A desultory sequel put paid to plans for a *Nagaremono* series.

Of course, *Tokyo nagaremono* was also a Nikkatsu *akushon* picture. Yet this genre had no stylistic, tonal, or narrative consistency beyond the *sine qua non* of the action sequence and the presence of iconic objects such as guns and cars. The *akushon* picture could accommodate the hardest of hard-boiled (Furukawa Takumi's *Kenjū zankoku monogatari/Cruel Gun Story*, 1964), light comic fare, or prestige romantic melodramas of heterosexual coupling (Masuda Toshio's *Akai hankachi/Red Handkerchief*, 1964).

*Tokyo nagaremono* is therefore a complex intertextual response to multiple generic conventions, including the sombre *ninkyō* tale of loyalty and the far-fetched *Wataridori* phenomenon. But as the common denominator is action, it is fitting to begin our examination of Suzuki's differential style with an analysis of his filming of action sequences.

### *Discontinuity in Action*

The film's earliest action sequence demonstrates the inception of a bolder, more intensive aesthetic of 'discontinuity editing'. It involves the hero Tetsu taking the wheel of the enemy's car. The scene features frequent and abrupt ellipses which, in terms of classical editing, are entirely dysfunctional, since they serve only to mystify

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<sup>9</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, p. 275.

the viewer about what has transpired between the break. In one shot, the car is on a road; after a shot of the passengers being tossed about, the car is now shown in the middle of a hitherto unseen stream. In the next shot it is back on land, in a quarry. Finally, the sequence abruptly disappears with a tranquil shot of a restaurant sign in Tokyo. It is never revealed how the heroes extricated themselves from the gangsters. Suzuki withholds both spatial and narrative clarity, seemingly for the sake of it.

A sequence involving a train track is even more radical. In the first shot, Tetsu is being pursued by his rival Viper Tatsu (Kawachi Tamio) across the snowy plains of Yamagata:



7:3 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (1): LS: a pan right shows that Viper (right) is just behind Tetsu (left). Viper turns away for a moment to put a silencer on his gun



7:4 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (2): LS: Viper turns his head back in the direction of Tetsu. A non-diegetic, translucent, triangular mask covers the Upper Left side of the frame



7:5 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (3): LS: Viper's POV of the empty field of snow in front of him: Tetsu has mysteriously disappeared



7:6 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (5): LS of Viper on a rail bridge, while Tetsu is behind the cement pylon underneath the bridge. There are no visible means by which Tetsu could have climbed down. The non-diegetic mask now emanates from the lower left



7:7 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (8): Extreme LS: an abrupt ellipsis. Viper is now also under the bridge, aiming his gun at Tetsu on the tracks in the foreground



7:8 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (13): MS: Six shots later, Viper is still pointing his gun at Tetsu. He has not fired.



7:9 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (20) LS: After Seven further shots Viper, still on the track, finally fires as Tetsu (the mask is now atop the frame)



7:10 Discontinuity in Action, Shot (21): Overhead LS of Tetsu, still on the tracks, running towards Viper with the train behind him. Tetsu drops to the ground at a non-diegetic red line and fires before the train roars past

This bizarre action sequence contains narrative mysteries created by spatial non-sequitars: how did Tetsu disappear (from a long shot) and reappear under the bridge? Why does Viper wait on the tracks for twelve shots before shooting? What benefit does Tetsu derive from running towards Viper's bullets?<sup>10</sup> It is not simply the case that Suzuki has more interest in expressive stylization than verisimilitude. The translucent masking over the lens, in select shots, has no detectable expressive function and is purposely distracting. Altogether, the train sequence is a deliberately orchestrated nonsense.

It is impossible to understand Suzuki's aesthetic as anything other than symptomatic of a 'break,' if not a 'breakdown'. Narrative coherence is frequently denied, diegesis is often ruptured, but more than this, local narrative and visual events are themselves fragmented. The twin essence of the *akushon* formula—the action

<sup>10</sup> This sequence is a telling homage to a scene in Ford's *Stagecoach* (Walter Wanger, 1939) in which John Wayne, in a rifle duel with the villains, walks boldly towards them and then drops to the ground before firing. The comparison, however, only serves to underscore the dysfunctionality of the Suzuki version. Ford's duel is predicated on the question of which party will draw their gun and fire first: Wayne's bold advance therefore serves a purpose. But in the Suzuki version, Viper Tatsu has already drawn his gun and has it trained on Tetsu, while the latter's gun remains unseen until Shot (22), and is not in his hand before that point. Without the ability to draw first, Tetsu's dash towards Viper is nonsensical. The reference to Ford seems more a playful quotation than an inspiration for an action sequence.



sequence itself and the martial, masculine superiority of the hero—are particularly subject to this dismantling. One must conclude that Suzuki's attitude towards genre in *Tokyo nagaremono* is resoundingly negative.

This is in notable disagreement with Hasumi Shigehiko, the most prestigious of Suzuki's supporters within Japanese academia. Hasumi argues that when Suzuki cuts without strict regard for continuity (for example, when he cuts before the principal action of the shot is completed, as when Ōtsuka slaps Chiharu in *Tokyo nagaremono*), the purpose is to create tension by speeding up the tempo. It reflects, for Hasumi, 'a consistent dedication to suspense and action.'<sup>11</sup> For Hasumi, Suzuki's is categorically *not* an avant-garde artist even though he 'achieve[s] avant-garde effects' (a suspicious distinction), and is certainly not parodic in his treatment of genre material.<sup>12</sup> But how can Hasumi accommodate the radical derangement of cause and effect in *The Violence Trilogy*? That Suzuki's action editing represents a violation of studio practice is unquestionable. Hasumi confirms this in regards to the director's 'disordered' handling of images and symbols associated with weather and the seasons.<sup>13</sup> But evidently Hasumi wishes to demonstrate a fidelity to action and suspense on a more idiosyncratic level. In commonsense terms, however, suspense requires suspension of disbelief, a maintenance of faith in the film's diegesis. In a film in which 'the fantastic' is not a diegetic given, there must be at least a temporary acceptance that what is happening on the screen reflects a spatial, temporal, and physical plausibility in proximity to the viewer's own profilmic experience. Therefore, if Hasumi has a point in regard to the more earnest dramaturgy of *Kantō mushuku*, his argument founders in regards to the *Violence Trilogy* that, he concedes, 'disorders a

<sup>11</sup> Hasumi, 'A World Without Seasons' in Suzuki and Hasumi, *The Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 14. The textual evidence Hasumi provides for these general claims is from the earlier *yakuza* sequence.

<sup>12</sup> Hasumi, pp. 13, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Hasumi, pp. 5-9.

ready-made genre.’<sup>14</sup>

The argument that Suzuki is dedicated to a cinema of action and movement is far more defensible than the idea that he is interested in suspense. Although Hasumi is often convincing on the former point, I am more persuaded by an applied ‘Deleuzian reading’ of Suzuki (see Chapter Eight), which would view his practice as a clear ‘breakdown’ of the *action image* of the classical cinema. Classical action, for Deleuze, derived its uncanny power from the imitation of the human sensory-motor schema, that is, the spatial and temporal conditions of the subjective perception of a given viewer. In violating this so deliberately, Suzuki is in closer proximity to the *nuberu bagu* and the *nouvelle vague* than Hasumi cares to admit.

Not that Hasumi’s reading is totally incommensurable with Deleuze. Hasumi sees the film’s discontinuity of action as giving rise to a state of ‘pure action,’ a constant sensation of pure movement uninterrupted and uninhibited by symbolic gesture.<sup>15</sup> For his part, Deleuze sees discontinuity of action, generally, as giving rise to a ‘pure’ state of time (or *time image*) which is beyond a reductively sequential concept of time. Hasumi’s term ‘pure action’ is not opposed to the *time image*, for ‘pure action’ is not the same as Deleuze’s classical ‘action image,’ in which the action is seen ‘as if through one’s own eyes.’ Hasumi’s term is better understood as pure *kinesis*, for the purpose of which spatio-temporal coherence is only a limitation. An intensive state of *kinesis* is something that, arguably, can *only* arise through the breakdown of such coherence.

Where my reading principally differs with Hasumi, then, is in the negative consequences of spectacle and ‘pure action’ for dramaturgy (what Hasumi calls ‘suspense’) and for the viewer’s consciousness of generic convention. An excessive

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<sup>14</sup> Hasumi, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Hasumi, pp. 21-22.



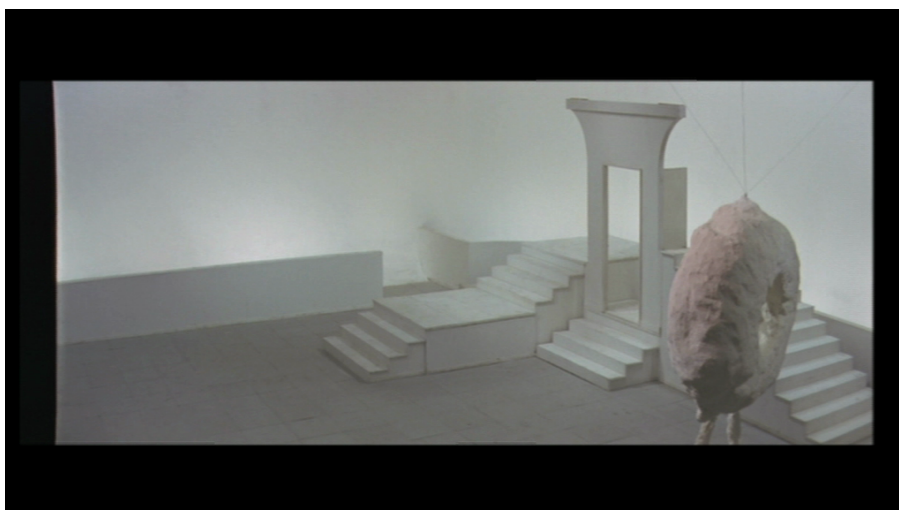
amount of generic awareness leads to an ironic and occasionally disenchanted view of ‘the ordinary product.’ Even Hasumi, in considering Suzuki’s films of 1966-7 as marked by ‘the spirit of rebellion,’ concedes that the Suzuki aesthetic aspired to a ‘self-destructive’ tendency in which the director’s investigation of cinema ‘finds out more limitations than possibilities’;<sup>16</sup> in other words, a negative aesthetic.

The climactic shootout of the film, in the Club Alulu, provides an excellent test case. It also adds a theatrical dimension to the absurdity of the previous action sequences. This is boldly announced by a non-diegetic change of coloured lighting *in media res*.



7:11 Imposed Style, Shot (1a): The nightclub set begins entirely black, then fades in as Tetsu enters the space: the donut-shaped sculpture insists on the non-diegetic provenance of the light sources

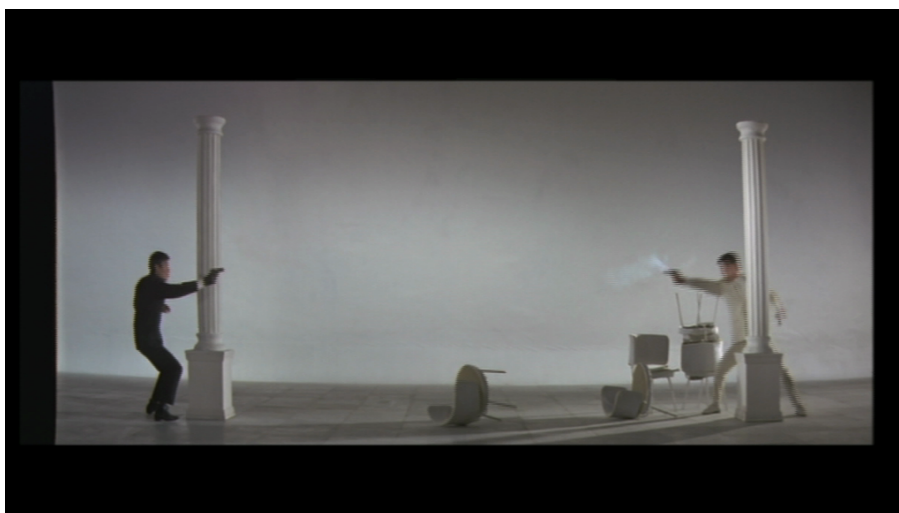
<sup>16</sup> Hasumi, pp. 20-22



7:12 Imposed Style, Shot (1b): in the same shot, after Tetsu kills Ōtsuka (and four others), the lighting turns a blanket white, as if an orgasm resulting from masculine violence

But perhaps a more revealing aspect of the scene is the theatricality of Kimura's nightclub set. Compared to the theatricality of *Hana to dotō* (1964), this represents a bolder leap into artifice and self-reflexivity. Theatricality in Suzuki's Violence Trilogy is never an end in itself. If Suzuki were to agree that movies would benefit from being viewed as spectacles, the equivalent of stage presentations, rather than as 'happenings in the world,' this still does not go far enough. Like discontinuity, theatricality must be used to reveal a cinematic 'falsity.' It must negate some aspect of cinematic practice that, in other hands, might be passed off as conventionally or consensually 'real'.

In the space of one shot, the already stylized climax degenerates into farce and incredulity. Tetsu and another gangster are perched behind evidently fake Greek columns that, because unconnected to anything, blatantly have no use value. They are ludicrously small, not wide enough to conceal a human body, and scarcely more than ten feet apart from one another. And yet, Tetsu and the gangster shoot directly at one another from such a short distance away, with neither of them managing to score a hit:



7:13: Theatrical Style as Falsity

What are we to make of this, if not generic self-parody? Hasumi's characterization provides no answer. Certainly, the shot plays upon the motif of surface and depth, appearance and reality, so evident throughout the film. Even if one assumes that, within the diegesis, the columns are false because they are leftover set pieces from a musical number, Suzuki has his characters *act* as if they are real, i.e. adequate cover from which to evade bullets. The artificiality of the nightclub set, as a literal 'stage' for the action, inevitably announces the artificiality of the film itself and its generic requirements (the climactic shoot-out). The fact that Tetsu's fighting prowess is visualized in the most unbelievable terms shows this up, too, as a masquerade. It is one layer of artifice upon another, masquerade upon masquerade, a *mise-en-abyme* from which nothing survives intact.



7:14 Heroic Action as Performative Dance: Tetsu throws his gun away, then leaps back onto it and shoots in three directions before his enemies can squeeze off a shot

To conclude that the scene is a productive confusion of the diegetic and the theatrical probably errs too much on the side of diegetic. It is more accurate to say that the very possibility of authenticity in genre film is exposed as merely rhetorical gesture—Watari’s pouting countenance, the snow-covered Yamagata landscape with its classical poetic associations, the evocative melancholy of the title song—and then dissolved within an aesthetic of falsity. This leads me to another point of agreement with Hasumi. Suzuki prefers and upholds an aesthetic of *surface*,<sup>17</sup> the knowing rhetorical gesture over the claim to truth. But in order to declare the primacy of surface, he must first reveal the falsity of the presumption of depth.

### *The Aesthetics of Iconicity*

How can one characterize the formal ‘leap ahead’ that Suzuki accomplished between the yakuza sequence of 1963-65 and the Violence Trilogy of 1966-7? Hasumi is noticeably hesitant on this question.<sup>18</sup> We have already discussed the intensified aesthetic of discontinuity, the rhetoric of ‘falsity,’ and the breakdown of

<sup>17</sup> Hasumi, pp. 17-18, 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> Hasumi, p. 20, writes that Suzuki ‘gradually evolved’ toward an idiosyncratic ‘kind of avant-garde.’

generic integrity. But we need to identify a deeper shift in Suzuki's formal address to his audience which causes and conditions these intensive formal strategies. The shift is one which, moreover, enables Suzuki to break out of an ideological mode dependent on the righteous *yakuza* hero who, despite the corruption of *yakuza* and corporate society around him, still legitimizes Japanese patriarchy and its monopoly on violence.

I would characterize this new 'breakthrough' as a particular form of reflexivity. Reflexivity entails self-consciousness of filmic narration,<sup>19</sup> which will constitute the main strategy of *Koroshi no rakuin*. And yet *Tokyo nagaremono* offers a different kind of reflexivity as well, one which contemplates the function of genre and stardom in the popular culture of the 1960s. It is this culture, after all, permeated on every level by the form of the commodity, which imposed such generic structures upon the cinema.

In other words, with *Tokyo nagaremono*, Suzuki initiates a self-reflexive aesthetics of *iconicity*. This is a vernacular, even populist form of reflexivity because it evolved not primarily out of avant-garde discourse, but from an experimental temperament working in a commercial cinema aimed (theoretically) at pleasing a knowing audience. Iconicity is also 'populist' because it trades on a currency with which the mass audience is abundantly familiar: the iconography of stars and of generic objects (like the cowboy hat). Audiences recognize such icons as meaningful entities, not just within a particular narrative, but applicable to multiple narratives and to the society that produces them. The commercial workings of iconography were evident in Kobayashi Akira's 'cowboy' persona-cum-fashion statement in the *Wataridori* series. For Suzuki, the question becomes how and in what way the

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<sup>19</sup> Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. xiv, 2, 7, 128-130, 138-140, 142-144, 151-152. Stam, it must be said, does not *systematically* address processes of cinematic narration.

viewer's consciousness of iconography can be deployed for a greater range of artistic and critical (rather than simply commercial) purposes.

Iconicity, therefore, has profound consequences for Suzuki's transformation of narration in the genre film. It effects his largely negative representation of character subjectivity in *Tokyo nagaremono*, marked by a cartoonish excess which is often typical of iconic discourse as opposed to naturalist discourse. It effects the film's representation of gender as largely performative: masculinity is revealed not to have a basis in any authentic or 'original' model, but in reference to culture and media.

What constitutes a particularly 'iconic' visual discourse in a medium which universally and automatically deploys iconic signification? Gaylyn Studlar treats this question fully in her noted study of the films of Josef Von Sternberg. Beginning with Peirce's distinction between iconic and indexical signs, Studlar finds that the question of 'iconic style' in the cinema involves 'the effect of style on the cinematic sign's classification as indexical, iconic, or symbolic'<sup>20</sup>. Bazin's theory of cinema emphasises the indexical; Eisenstein, to the contrary, insisted on a symbolic, 'linguistic' function of the image as a mere 'cell' or component of didactic montage. Studlar judges that neither stressed the iconic dimension: this was Von Sternberg's great quality. 'Von Sternberg remarked...that the perfect film of the future would be totally artificial.'<sup>21</sup> Iconicity de-stresses the indexical function by virtue of an anti-illusionistic, artificial visual style. 'Iconic relations do not value the illusion of authenticity...the reality of imagination is exalted over any presupposed objective reality'<sup>22</sup>.

And yet, anti-illusionism was not exactly a 'new discovery' for Suzuki, whereas I

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<sup>20</sup> Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> in Studlar, p. 90

<sup>22</sup> Studlar, p. 92.

claim that the iconicity of *Tokyo nagaremono*, *per se*, was. This may be explained by the fact that Studlar acknowledges, but seems not to fully tease out, the relation between iconicity and intertextuality. In its everyday usage, the word ‘iconic’ signifies ‘a person or thing regarded as representative of a culture...important or influential in a particular (cultural) context’<sup>23</sup>. It is an image that stands for a powerful idea, and this idea is ‘loaded’ with cultural association for the ordinary viewer based on multiple textual experiences. As we shall see from the examples below, an iconic directorial style can involve an excess emphasis on the icon as a cultural sign that is so overly familiar that it detaches itself from a particular diegesis: in effect, a cliché.

The iconic discourse in *Tokyo nagaremono* focuses, unsurprisingly, on the (exclusively masculine) iconography common to *yakuza*, *akushon*, and crime thrillers in the 1960s: guns, glasses, and suits. Working in a familiar generic context, Suzuki does not merely present, but ‘quotes’ those genre elements so well-known to his audience, rather than passing them off as a ‘natural’ consequence of social representation, as a gangster film invested in verisimilitude might do, for example, *Kenjū zankoku Monogatari* (1964).

A very clear example of ‘iconic quotation’ is the extraordinary emphasis that Suzuki places on the image of the gun in the first scene of *Tokyo nagaremono*. Trying to go straight, the protagonist Tetsu has refused to fight a rival gang and has been savagely beaten for his trouble. In this monochromatic opening sequence, the battered Tetsu, unable to defend his own honour and virility, sees a gun lying on the ground and feels the temptation to reach for it. The gun is emphasised by a close-up loosely from Tetsu’s POV. So far, despite the familiar cliché of the ‘the gun within arm’s reach,’ this is not an unusually iconic visual rhetoric. With one of his characteristic

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<sup>23</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* [Online].

non-diegetic effects, however, Suzuki depicts the gun as glowing red against the monochrome background. To take matters still further, the glowing gun seems to be merely a children's toy.



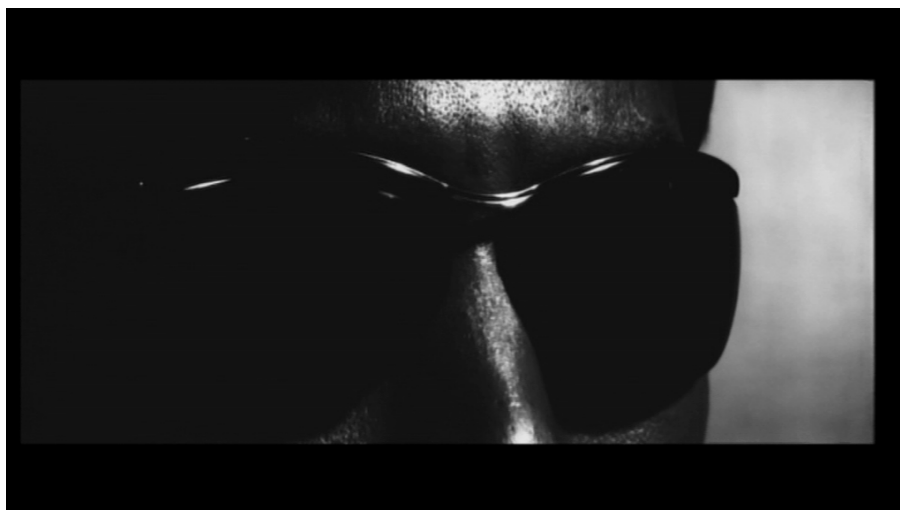
7:15 An Icon of the Genre: the gun 'triply emphasised' by film style

This commodity form of the icon of the gun trades on the play of surface/depth and the motif of 'falsity'. Moreover, this 'triple' emphasis on a cinematic icon (the pistol) promotes a consciousness of cliché. Such a consciousness on the part of the viewer is very easy to achieve when Suzuki's artifice has 'extracted' the sign from out of the diegesis.

By such means, Suzuki is able to manipulate pop-cultural iconography for a number of ends: he holds up genre conventions to potential mockery; he characterizes pop culture as commodity-based and an endless, transient flux of sensory stimulation; he redirects the iconic husks of genre in the service of an ideological critique, in a manner not so different from the mid-1960s films of Godard (e.g. *Alphaville*, 1965). The satirical potential of iconic discourse is clear from Suzuki's use of six extreme close-ups of sunglasses to introduce the sadistic *yakuza*, Ōtsuka (Esumi Eimei). The



glasses are all that Suzuki requires to sum up this cartoonish patriarch: they are his armour and phallic signifier. Suzuki had already used this kind of iconic shorthand in *Sono gosōsha wo nerae: 'Jūsangō taihisen' yori* (1960).<sup>24</sup>



7:16 Iconic Shorthand: for twenty-five minutes, the cold villain Ōtsuka is viewed only by extreme close-ups on his sunglasses (or else from the back of his head)

But it is chiefly the iconic discourse of the movie hero that enables a critical view of pop culture as commodity. In the opening scene, Ōtsuka warns his subordinates about his formidable enemy, ‘Third Time Phoenix Tetsu,’ so-called because if anyone challenges him three times in a row, he will finally get angry. As Ōtsuka speaks, the monochromatic opening scene is interrupted by a three-second, splashy colour insert of the heroic Tetsu. Dressed in a yellow suit against a black background, Tetsu spins around and shoots off his gun, accompanied by flashes of red, in three different directions. This brief colour image has no clear diegetic status. Instead it utilises colour spectacle not merely to ‘illustrate,’ but to ‘advertise’ the hero in an iconic pose.

<sup>24</sup> The villain of this film, a sort of corporate ‘pimp’ who murders his own prostitutes when convenient, hides his identity behind his sunglasses, again viewed in extreme close-up. When his glasses are finally torn off, the villain turns out to be the dignified and elderly father of the horrified heroine.



7:17 The Action Hero as Commodity: Watari Tetsuya as 'Third Time Phoenix Tetsu'

The black background, devoid of any location or spatial depth, is indeed reminiscent of an advert. The character of Tetsu, before he is properly introduced in the narrative, has been defined according to a 'trademark' fighting style (which reappears at the climax). The insert attempts to turn Tetsu (and actor Watari) into an instant icon like James Bond who can, among other things, be utilised in other narratives such as the anticipated *Nagaremono* series. Viewed in a more ironic light, however, Suzuki presents a 'hero,' much like any other *akushon* hero, who is denied subjectivity, pre-packaged and reduced to a fixed, predictable commodity.

In fact, Suzuki's representation of 1960s Tokyo posits a society under the thumb of advanced capitalism, visually and symbolically manifest through the ubiquity of advertising. The dominance of the visual culture of advertising represents the director's iconic discourse at its most critically prescient. In three montage sequences he portrays Akasaka—as well as Sasebo, where the American military presence is symbolically exploited—as a virtual sea of neon signage, each sign promising a more exotic and erotic product than the last.



7:18 The Libidinal Economy: the exotic sexual promise of Akasaka's neon signage

One Akasaka cabaret sign is a cartoonish neon approximation of a nude girl; another club called The Casanova connotes a ‘Latin’ sexual promise. The city life in ‘New Tokyo’ is suffused with a commodity fetishism that conditions the identities of its inhabitants through the channelling and selling of libidinal energy. *Tokyo nagaremono* is probably the only *yakuza* film in which the narcissistic tough guys are seen to use and discuss the latest 1966 fashion in men’s hair dryers, the ‘Light Punch.’ But Suzuki anticipates Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) in preferring to observe the operations of the libidinal economy through the disorienting neon regime of the specular. The city’s visual surface eternally promises fulfilment—i.e. depth—for a price, but, as we shall see, there is nothing underneath except death. It is a society built on lies, or worse.

#### *Modernity and the City: Surface and Death*

The tripartite structure of *Tokyo nagaremono* is differentiated by location. The first and longest section of the film takes place in Tokyo. The second takes place in snowy Yamagata, where Tetsu has drifted, and the third takes place in Sasebo, near Nagasaki. *Tokyo nagaremono* accelerates in rhythm with each part: the Yamagata

section is less than half the length of the Tokyo, while the last section in Sasebo, centred around a barroom brawl, is short, frantic, violent, and, as a result of intercutting, fragmented.

The title sequence features a montage of the bright, touristic attractions of Tokyo circa 1966. A series of wipes display Tokyo Tower (finished 1958); the newly built *shinkansen* bullet trains; the new highway system connecting Southern and Western Tokyo; the Yoyogi Olympic gymnasium; the San-ai building of Ginza. Not one of these ‘monuments’ had existed before 1955. This is the ‘New Tokyo,’ the product of massive urban redevelopment in preparation for the city’s 1964 Olympic Games. There is no visual trace of pre-war, central Tokyo nor its *shitamachi* working class neighbourhoods. By 1966, Suzuki was hard put to recognize the city of his own youth.<sup>25</sup> While the Olympics were an initial *succès d’estime*, the cost to the residents of Tokyo of this top-down, high-handed, and often corrupt urban renewal program soon became apparent.<sup>26</sup> Skyrocketing property values, which depopulated the central city of middle class residents,<sup>27</sup> furnish the mundane plot of *Tokyo nagaremono*, which concerns the struggle of two yakuza gangs to acquire an office building. Suzuki’s film is thus a timely criticism of the effects of authoritarian redevelopment. Behind the bright, clean, commercial surfaces, there is only despair. The glamour of the title sequence (typical of a Nikkatsu film) works perfectly as the opening ‘screen’ underneath which Suzuki develops his ironic subtext. This is the image of Tokyo that he sets out to negate: Suzuki’s representation of the city, which doubles as a critical investigation of an era, is entirely structured by the visual opposition between ‘surface’

<sup>25</sup> The director commented, ‘Certainly it was a new city’ in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 276.

<sup>26</sup> Problems with waste disposal and water supply became national scandals; the authorities pushed the lower classes and the homeless from the metropole; domestic space became smaller and smaller while public crowding became endemic; Seidensticker, *Tokyo Rising* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 227, 233-235, 259; Roman A. Cybriwsky’s *Tokyo: The Shogun’s City at the Twenty-First Century*, rev. ed. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), pp. 93-97, offers a more critical view.

<sup>27</sup> Cybriwsky, pp. 125-6.

and ‘what-that-surface-conceals’. We cannot say ‘depth’ because *nothing* lies behind the surfaces of Tokyo: nothing, that is, except death, which amounts to the same.

This opposition dominates Kimura Takeo’s memorable realization of the film’s major Tokyo interiors, the Club Alulu in Akasaka and the ‘Club Manhole’ in the Shinjuku area. Club Alulu is a posh cabaret with an empty, cavernous interior bathed entirely in garish yellow. The depth and contours of the space are completely erased by the oversaturated colouration. The performance stage consists of a detached staircase beneath a free-standing door that, symbolically, leads to nowhere.



7:19 Stage Door: the illusive, elusive space of the affluent Club Alulu

Visually, the Club is as elusive as its owner, the false-faced Boss Kurata (Kita Ryūji). All that can be seen is a hazy but lavish display of expanse and wealth, typical of the ageing patriarchy to which the club caters. Akasaka was famous for entertaining the ruling elite, and for this reason, the Club is not, like other cabarets, a place for sexual titillation, but for the substitute eroticism of commodity fetishism and conspicuous consumption.

As its name suggests, The Manhole Jazz Café, owned by the sadistic Ōtsuka, is a

less dignified establishment. The main interior is glimpsed only briefly, in three shots lasting a total of 12 seconds, yet full of dynamism and movement. A crowd of teenagers dances madly around an unbelievably modish and garish space suffused with purple light, while a dozen pipes, each painted a different pastel colour, snake their way across it, even functioning as chairs.



7: 20 Club Manhole: Youth, Sexual Suggestion and the Commodification of Excess

Dripping with sexual suggestion, the Manhole is a place of frenzied excess. A promise of Dionysian violence seems to loom over the revels. The spectre of death is communicated by the opposition of ‘surface’ and ‘underneath.’ The pipes, like club’s suggestive name, challenge us to look beneath the surface, to ‘plumb’ the depths: when Tetsu attempts to ‘penetrate’ the interior, he is dumped into a dark grimy hole, the embodiment of abjection.



7:21 What Lies Beneath: through 'The Manhole' and into the abject

Here, Tetsu finds the corpse of the last honourable businessman in Tokyo, the elderly Yoshii (Hino Michio). His death, in this place of nothingness, signals the ascent of 'New Tokyo' and its corrupt and venal rulers.

What is it that links the libidinal pleasures of the 1960s (the dancing teenagers) to the promise of violence? Since *Tokyo nagaremono* returns obsessively to *yakuza* aggression against women (Kurata's murder of the secretary, Ōtsuka's abuse of Chiharu, Tetsu's coldness towards Chiharu), it is perhaps this which provides the link. Sexual mores may have loosened, but the gendered power structure remains its old, oppressive self.



7:22 Women and *yakuza*: the threatened Chiharu travels across Japan to find her boyfriend: on an opposite-moving train, he cannot bring himself to acknowledge her

It is an open question whether the nihilism of *Tokyo nagaremono* represents the world-view of its director or a moral criticism of the shallowness of the 1960s, an awareness that there *should* be a depth that is lacking. *Tokyo nagaremono* is characterized by this ambivalence, or perhaps, by a spirit of investigation. The second section, in quiet, traditional Yamagata, represents Tetsu's search for 'depth' in Japanese cultural traditions. Yet this is represented as a false hope. Tetsu liaises with the local *oyabun*, whose residence resembles those of the Edo-period *daimyo* (provincial lords). Kimura Takeo exploits the recessed panelling of Tokugawa architecture to suggest an infinite depth that is equated with tradition. The solemn, rigid formality of the *oyabun* and his environment suggest that in its own way Yamagata, reminiscent of an age of duty, aristocracy, and self-sacrifice, is just as deathly and alienated as Tokyo. Because of his youth and post-war situation, historical depth and rituals cannot take a hold over Tetsu. If the 'honorific' behaviour of the *yakuza* can be said to take two forms—the form of ritual and the form of violence—then Tetsu can only express his fanatically dutiful nature through the latter.

In contrast with traditional Yamagata, the Sasebo section is dominated by a humorous Western saloon brawl reminiscent of *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939). A *reductio ad absurdum* of the *Wataridori* series, this section takes place entirely in the realm of intertextual reference and movie iconography. The search for 'truth' is abandoned in favour of an ecstatic reinvestment in cliché, the more foreign, the more liberating. Even this section, however, ends on a sour note which brings us back to where we started: the betrayed Tetsu returns to confront Tokyo and its rulers in a frenzy of righteous violence.



*The Necessity of Betrayal: A Generation without Fathers*

The contemporary milieu of *Tokyo nagaremono* situates a conflict between generations and competing versions of masculinity. Suzuki mounts the ‘story’ of *Tokyo nagaremono*—that of a young *yakuza* betrayed by a boss (*oyabun*) whom he loves like a father—in order to reiterate the theme of the *necessity* of betrayal.

Betrayal is necessary not only because of Kurata himself—affable on the outside, utterly devoid of morality on the inside—but because of his social context. Betrayal is simply the reality of contemporary *yakuza* life: ‘It’s just one of those things,’ shrugs Kurata. In contrast, the (media) stereotype revolves around principle and ritual. While the rituals (overwhelmingly prominent in Tōei’s *ninkyō eiga*) maintain the illusion of a functional patriarchal family, Suzuki’s film stresses the Oedipal structure of the *yakuza* and links it to advanced capitalism, that great new determining factor in Japanese life, which, like the Oedipal scenario, is based on competition. Kurata tries to escape the logic of succession: confusing institutional power with virility, the father must kill the son in order to avoid the truth of his own obsolescence. His failure to do so is the cause of his own death.

In negating the rightful authority of the *oyabun*, Suzuki (and Kawauchi, whose original script included the betrayal theme) accomplished in 1966 what Standish credits to the director Fukusaku in the early 1970s: ‘an antithetical position...presenting masculinity beset in a world devoid of an archetypal patriarch.’<sup>28</sup> The masculine star image of Montgomery Clift was a visual, and I would argue ideological, model for up-and-coming Nikkatsu stars like Kobayashi and, later, Watari. Steven Cohan has analysed Clift’s image as that of the ‘boy who wants to be a man.’ With this image, the post-war studios could trade on the ‘erotic appeal of these young actors...underscoring their alienation from the screen’s more traditional

<sup>28</sup> Isolde Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), p. 184.

representations of masculinity,<sup>29</sup> while still theoretically upholding that tradition. For Clift in *Red River* (Hawks, 1946/8), there is still a heroic father (John Wayne), however cracked or bigoted, to look up to and compete with. In Japan, however, Tetsu's generation, born during wartime, is a generation without fathers, and Kurata's impotent faithlessness is the proof. As Satō Tadao reported, 'It is commonly said in Japan that women have become stronger because men have lost all confidence in their masculinity due to Japan's defeat.'<sup>30</sup> Thus, Tetsu must set out on his wandering quest to locate a social and sexual identity within the post-war landscape, a quest doomed to failure.

Of course, the yakuza's betrayal of 'values' in favour of capitalist greed had been a 'complaint' of the *yakuza eiga* since its beginning (Chapter Five), but Suzuki's 1966 take has the ring of historical truth: '1960 marked a turning point...[after which] the yakuza distanced themselves from rightist violence....They were less violence specialists...and more economic beings that dealt in corruption.'<sup>31</sup> The legal advisors Kumamoto (Chō Hiroshi) and Fujimura (Kiura Sazō) represent a new 'managerial' class of *yakuza* who effortlessly destroy Tetsu when legions of gunmen have failed.<sup>32</sup> They appeal to Kurata's financial security—his place in the *system* as opposed to the 'family.' *Tokyo nagaremono* brings us to the endpoint in the evolution of the *yakuza* as one functional cog in the corporate wheel. In *Koroshi no rakuin*, the gang structure itself vanishes, subsumed into a vast, technocratic, semi-legitimate 'Organisation.'

This split between a pragmatic patriarchal machine and an idealized, honorific Japanese masculinity determines Suzuki's representation of three generations of masculinity in seemingly inevitable conflict. As always in a Suzuki film, betrayal by

<sup>29</sup> Cohan, p. 203.

<sup>30</sup> 'Kaneto Shindo' in Wakeman, John, ed. *World Film Directors, Volume 2*. (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), p. 176.

<sup>32</sup> Although these two are not explicitly identified as lawyers, they act in the capacity of the *consigliere* of the Italian mafia, that is, as dealmakers who liaise with the legitimate worlds of finance and law.

the father is an allusion to the war. At about 70, Boss Kurata represents the architects of Japanese imperialism. Tetsu is in his twenties, and thus a member of the post-war generation for whom imperial Japan is not even a memory, no less ‘legendary’ than the Japan of the samurai nostalgically evoked in post-war *chanbara*. Without personal experience to the contrary, Tetsu finds the legend more appealing than the fact of his own situation.

There is an intermediary generation between these two represented by the ex-*yakuza* drifter ‘Nagareboshi’ (Shooting Star), memorably played by the falling Nikkatsu star Nitani Hideaki. Nitani was born in 1930, but his lined face and practical clothes, contrasted to the youthful, fashionable appearance of Watari, make him appear much older. ‘Shooting Star’ represents Suzuki’s own generation, those that suffered in the Pacific War. He is a melancholy and disillusioned character, forever warning young Tetsu not to put too much trust in his elders. Thus, when Shooting Star makes statements such as, ‘I know the pain of being betrayed. I wanted to spare Tetsu that...but he has to go through it himself,’ it is clear that the *yakuza* backstory is a flimsy cover: he is metonymically referring to the betrayal of Japan by its leaders during the war. The film’s only true *nagaremono*, Shooting Star no longer belongs to the social structure. Like his directorial alter ego Suzuki (note the identical roman initials ‘SS’),<sup>33</sup> he has seen through it. ‘SS’ is the ideological focal point of the film: possessed of the demoralizing truth, his wisdom can only be expressed in negative and preventative terms: ‘I don’t want him to go through what I did.’ Most importantly, Shooting Star’s lonely but secure masculinity is the measure of Tetsu’s failed pretence. It is still based on toughness and martial prowess—this is a *yakuza* actioner, after

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<sup>33</sup> The extent to which Japanese print and media culture in the 1960s fostered a widespread consciousness and usage of roman initials may be seen by the widespread use of the name ‘BBS’ for the NGO organisation *Biggu Burazāsu ando Shisutāsu* (Big Brothers and Sisters) which appears in Suzuki’s film *Fumihazushita haru* (1958). Kosuge Haruo used the initials in his review for *Kinema junpō* no. 213 (Early Sept. 1958), p. 76.

all—but this masculinity does not exclude giving, caring, and tolerance of insult, nor homoeroticism and fluidity of sexual preference. In this 1966 film, the character's sexual identity can only be referred to in code, but I argue that the relationship between Tetsu and 'SS' is characterized by homoerotic tension and not by the more conventional homosociality. Shooting Star's attraction to Tetsu results in the latter's ambivalent and suspicious attitude towards him. The only legitimate father figure to Tetsu and his generation, he is also the most off-limits because of that Oedipal disavowal of incest from which Tetsu suffers more greatly than anyone around him.

### *Violence, Commodity, and Masculine Crisis*

In contrast to the easygoing Shooting Star, Tetsu is perpetually sulky and irritable. Suzuki has said that the key to this character is his stiff, unnatural gait, an imitation of John Wayne.<sup>34</sup> Tetsu is as uncomfortable in his own skin as he is with other people. He seems happy only when playing cards with strangers, or when sitting with his girlfriend, but *only* on the condition of distance. At one point, Chiharu expects Tetsu to accompany her to her bedroom; instead, Tetsu rolls up his car window, and with this barrier safely established between them, drives away from her with an affectionate wave. The pronounced masochism of Chiharu does not mitigate the fact that Tetsu has a neurotic fear of female sexuality and struggles to contain a misogynist impulse.

This is hardly without cinematic precedent. Cohan writes that 'an uncomfortable feeling about romancing women central to Bogart's persona as a tough guy...found its way into the misogyny of his post-war film roles...with his "toughness" functioning as a mechanism of sexual regulation...of...hegemonic masculinity.'<sup>35</sup> This may be overstated, but it suggests how Tetsu is problematically aligned to an older

<sup>34</sup> Isoda and Todoroki, eds., (2005) p. 275; Suzuki, *Kenka erejii* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2003), p. 127.

<sup>35</sup> Cohan, p. 83-84.

generational ideal of masculinity and thus to the ‘hysterical’ containment of the feminine for which Suzuki has relentlessly satirized Japanese patriarchy. Tetsu is not much different from the impotent Kurata who, when given an opportunity to shoot his bitter enemy Ōtsuka, instead shoots a sexually threatening young secretary.

At the same time, however, Tetsu’s reactionary masculinity is at odds with the new libidinal economy. As Stephen Barber writes, Tetsu is ‘the sole inhabitant who refuses to participate in that sexual regime.’<sup>36</sup> But Barber does not notice the neurotic ambivalence of this revolt against commodification. For example, Tetsu’s iconic baby blue suit, perpetually clean and immaculate no matter what violence is going on, recalls the costume of Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*, in which Grant plays an advertising executive. As Cohan interprets, ‘The male adaptation of commercial fashion signified the unorthodox—but...economically advantageous—absorption of masculinity into consumerism...as both a producer and product of the advertising industry’.<sup>37</sup> Cohan’s thesis serves to explain Suzuki’s emphasis on adverts for male hair dryers.



7:23 Masculinity and Commodity Fetishism: Tetsu tries the 'Light Punch' male hair dryer

<sup>36</sup> Barber, *Projected Cities* (London: Reaktion, 2006), p.130.

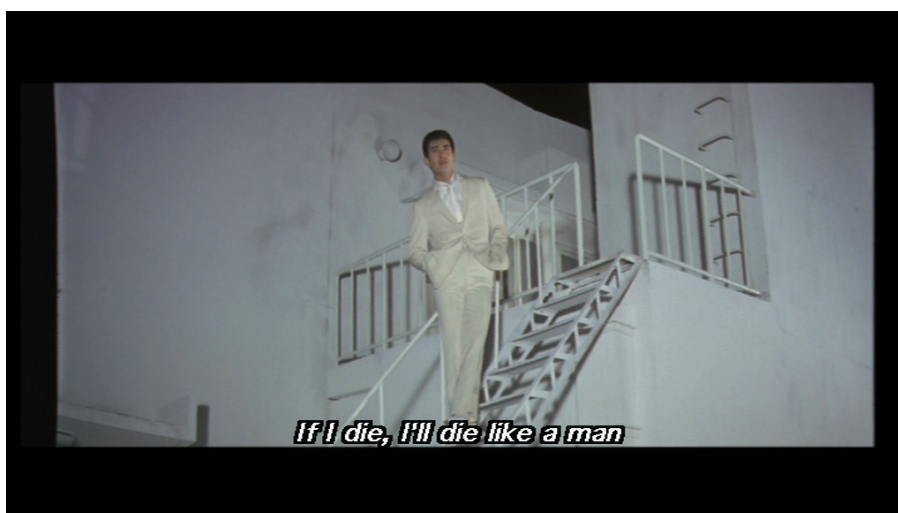
<sup>37</sup> Cohan, p. 19.

Tetsu's performance of a pre-war masculinity belies his interest in clothes and hair. Tetsu does not need to prove his fighting ability—that is a narrative given—but he has something to prove about his sexual identity. Why does he put on the masquerade of having a girlfriend whom he loves like a mother, but does not desire? Heterosexual desire has evidently been sublimated, and substituted, by a commodity narcissism which is necessarily auto-erotic. Therefore, Tetsu's fanatical embracement of 'honorific' male violence is an absurd overreaction to a widespread source of male angst in the libidinal economy of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>38</sup> Despite his sulkiness, Tetsu's fanatical morality is not inner-directed but other-directed, a conformist type derived from media and pursued with a single-mindedness that only shows up the masculine ideal as an absurd performance, neurotic at base and disastrous in consequence.

Tetsu begins the film as a lonely man and ends it even lonelier. In the final sequence, he looks out upon a sea of Akasaka cabaret signs advertising sexual promise.

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<sup>38</sup> cf. Satō's perception, fn. 30 above; the influential director Itami Jūzō, who was a contemporary of the *nuberu bagu* directors, a prominent actor of the 1960s and the husband of the *Shine kurabu*'s Kawakita Kazuko, observed in retrospect that the 'the major problem with the young generation, as I see it, is that the role of the father has become extremely weak...particularly in the postwar period. Because Japanese men fought the war and lost it, their value as role models has really declined. The result is that children have no way of learning to control their desires, and it's been that way for some time. So now we have a generation of young people who...have no underlying principles for controlling their desires....Japan has become a country in which only the pleasure principle matters'; in Mark Schilling, *Contemporary Japanese Film* (New York: Weatherhill, 1999), pp. 79-80. In the United States, the dominant 1950s periodical *Life Magazine* observed the habits of 'the new American domesticated male,' while *Look Magazine*'s 1958 cover story, 'The Decline of the American Male,' fretted that 'men let themselves be dominated...they conform to the values of the crowd much too readily': Cohan, pp. xix, 4-6, 54-5.



7:24 Urban *Flâneur*? The lonely Tetsu looks over the sexualised, neon cityscape of Tokyo

After his cathartic orgy of violence, has Tetsu finally accommodated himself to his environment? It is difficult to imagine a solution to his identity crisis. He has rejected monogamy, yet heterosexual promiscuity has never been an option. Is Tetsu capable of adjusting to Shooting Star's non-conformist life of homoerotic bonding? Or will the narcissism of the urban *flâneur*, punctuated by bouts of sexualized violence, suffice? It appears not, for the final shot of the film shows Tetsu walking off in the opposite direction, drifting away from the bright lights of Tokyo once again.

In summary, the classical studio star system depended on a rhetoric of authenticity, a 'guarantee' to viewers that a star was more or less just as he appeared in his films.<sup>39</sup> Extending his aesthetics of iconicity to both Nikkatsu stardom and its commodity culture, Suzuki shows up the façade of authenticity in a movie that, for the studio and critics, was all about the creation of a star.

Moreover, the rhetoric of youthful sincerity had a deeper resonance in Japanese post-war cinema. The clean-cut and romantic heroes of countless post-war *chanbara* were exemplars of ideological and moral purity (*makoto*) which had its roots in the Meiji and pre-war culture of militarism. Tetsu represents a fetishisation of *makoto*

<sup>39</sup> Cohan, p. 9.

taken to similarly violent extremes. Considering the similitude of Tetsu to wartime youth such as the *tokkōtai* (*kamikaze*) pilots, who were promoted to the nation (both during and since the war) as pinnacles of purity and devotion, it is a meaningful critique that came to full fruition in *Kenka erejii*.

## II. THE CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE IN *KENKA EREJII*

### *Violence and Absolutism in Kenka erejii*

*Kenka erejii* is about Kiroku (Takahashi Hideki), a young man in secondary school in the 1930s who is preternaturally drawn to fighting. The more sexually frustrated he becomes, the more he channels his libido into violence. One day he catches a glimpse of ultranationalist revolutionary Kita Ikki, and later learns of the February 1936 revolt of the young officers inspired by Ikki, which led to the assassination of several government officials and the execution of the revolutionaries. Inspired by the incident, Kiroku rushes off to Tokyo to join the biggest fight of all: the war in China.

Both *Tokyo nagaremono* and *Kenka erejii* are films about young fanatics, but the latter explicitly represents the coming-of-age of the war generation. It was scripted by the Leftist director Shindo Kaneto, a naval veteran like Suzuki, and then drastically changed by the director before filming<sup>40</sup>. Given such a pedigree, it is impossible to view the film without reference to the fate of young, patriotic servicemen of Suzuki's generation during the war era of 1932-1945.

Suzuki's colleague Shinoda Masahiro has said that he set out to answer 'How can...absolutism take hold in any individual?'<sup>41</sup> In *Kenka erejii*, Suzuki attempts to

<sup>40</sup> Shindō on *Kenka erejii* (1967) in Motomura, ed., *Seijun Seuzuki sōtokushū*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> in Keiko I. MacDonald, 'Defeat Revisited,' *Reading a Japanese Film* (Honolulu; Univ. of Hawaii, 2006), p. 152.



answer just that, in the form of a *bildungsroman* devoted to one student's idealistic and self-imposed devotion to martial training. By the 1930s, Japanese servicemen and their families had been shaped by decades of state propaganda and social ideology meant 'to encourage soldiers to plunge to death as an honourable act and for the people not to object to their sacrifice.'<sup>42</sup> The 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, an infamous attempt at social engineering by the Meiji oligarchs, ordered that a young person 'should sacrifice oneself courageously for the country by guarding the Imperial Throne.'<sup>43</sup> The nation's children were thus ordered to perform a samurai-esque 'duty unto death' to an almighty god (the emperor) who had only been declared to be such the previous year. Yet two victorious wars and the rise of Japanese nationalism served to naturalize this initially alien ideology by the turn of the century. Militarism in textbooks, school songs, and in state-sponsored Shintō reached every household.<sup>44</sup>

After three generations of such ideology, the period 1932-1945 saw not only casualties in battle, but various forms of self-sacrifice which strike us today as fanatical: for example, military operations which were expected to fail simply in order to make heroes of the fallen soldiers (the 'Nikudan' Incident of 1932, the Battleship Yamato);<sup>45</sup> *seppuku* in situations of military failure, an infrequent practice widely praised by war propaganda;<sup>46</sup> and *gyokusai*, or mass suicide charges by Japanese troops in hopeless situations such as the struggle for Attu Island (1943). Most infamous of all were the *tokkōtai* pilots of 1944-45, essentially a 'forced voluntary'

<sup>42</sup> Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 82, 131.

<sup>45</sup> On the so-called 'Nikudan incident,' in which military commanders sent three soldiers to their death in Shanghai simply to make media heroes out of them, see Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 113; Battleship Yamato was the Pacific War's largest and costliest battleship, built and sent into battle in wilful disregard of its strategic uselessness: see Yoshida Mitsuru's memoir, *Requiem for Battleship Yamato* (Naval Institute Books, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. John Dower, *Embracing Defeat* (London, Allen Lane, 1999), p. 34.

corps of servicemen and recent university graduates trained to smash bomb-holding planes into enemy ships.<sup>47</sup> In truth, many Japanese servicemen (including Suzuki and many of the *tokkōtai* pilots themselves) were neither fanatical nor interested in self-sacrifice. Suzuki's *Kenka erejii* sets out to tell the pre-history of the servicemen who were. As many have pointed out, it is an attempt at the loose autobiography of a generation. But the film is not only meaningful in historical reference: it is, simultaneously, a broad critique of the ideology of genre cinema and its representations of martial heroism, sexuality, and the war itself.



7:25 Violence and Genre Cinema: teenager Kiroku (Takahashi Hideki) is cajoled into violence in front of a poster for a silent Fox Western

What, specifically, do *tokkōtai* pilots, *nikudan*, gangster Tetsu, and juvenile delinquent Kiroku have in common, at least according to Suzuki? Surprisingly, *Kenka erejii* contains few references to the emperor, the *kokutai* ('the whole nation as one family') and other by-words of early Shōwa nationalism. Instead, it focuses on the deeper psychological and mythical underpinnings of a culture that promotes male violence and martial prowess to the point of death. For Suzuki, the question boils

<sup>47</sup> In addition to these missions, members of both the *tokkōtai* and regular navy were sent into the ocean in manned torpedoes known as *nikudan* (flesh bullets) meant to sink enemy ships. This was the subject of the 1968 film by Okamoto Kihachi (another naval veteran), *Nikudan* (produced by the Art Theatre Guild).

down to the significance of ‘fighting.’ In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore examine five major aspects of ‘fighting’ that Suzuki emphasises in *Kenka erejii*. First, its relation to the concept of purity (*makoto*), which under Suzuki’s critical gaze translates to sexual repression; second, its relation to the actual military culture of Japan; third, its relation to patriarchy and institutionalised concepts of masculinity; fourth, its relation to the ‘romantic idealism’ of pre-war culture; and finally, its relation to aesthetics.

### *Violence and Sexual Purity*

Whereas Tetsu in *Tokyo nagaremono* was functionally virginal, Kiroku is explicitly identified as a virgin harbouring an unrequited love for Michiko, the daughter of his innkeeper. As Donald Richie memorably writes, ‘his girlfriend is far too pure to do anything, and he hates himself for masturbating...a life of violence seems to be the only answer.’<sup>48</sup>

The idea of a ‘virginal’ soldier was both a wartime ideal and, often, a literal fact (as many servicemen had barely finished school). It is linked to a mythic ideal of masculinity unsullied by sexual contact with the feminine in both pre-modern and wartime culture. Sexual repression had always been an underpinning of the *giri/ninjō* (duty versus emotional inclination) narrative archetype that formed the structure of kabuki and its ancestors, *chanbara* and *yakuza* narratives.<sup>49</sup>

The motif played into wartime popular discourses of a seemingly ‘hysterical’ *machismo* and the rejection of the feminine. As Standish writes, ‘The underlying text inherent in the images of masculinity [in] Japanese films of the late 1930s and early 1940s was a discourse of sexual repression.’ She concludes that in the

<sup>48</sup> Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Cinema*, p. 180.

<sup>49</sup> Yoshikawa Eiji’s serialised 1935 novel *Musashi*, trans. Charles S. Terry (Kodansha, 1995), the most popular retelling of the Miyamoto Musashi legend for the war generation, emphasizes the *nagaremono* motif and the hero’s renunciation of love for the sake of his martial training.

morale-boosting wartime films of Inagaki Hiroshi and Ozu ‘the father figures become almost iconical virgin symbols (as in a reversal of a Christian virgin birth) of an ideal patriarchal male purity.’<sup>50</sup> Standish has also written at length about how 1950s war-retro films depicted the ‘purity’ of the suicide pilots who must overcome female attachment to do their duty.<sup>51</sup>

Standish’s mention of a Christian influence on this ‘virginal masculinity’ is fortuitous, as both Kiroku and Michiko in *Kenka erejii* happen to be Christians, while the film itself is replete with Christian imagery and symbolism. It is possible that Christianity, viewed critically as the immediate context of Kiroku’s sexual repression, is used as allegorical shorthand for a wider national pathology. Considering the wartime influence of Christian intellectuals such as Tanabe Hajime and Nitobe Inazō, author of the influential *Bushidō* (1899)<sup>52</sup>, it is unquestionable that an integral connection existed between Japanese militarism, pre-war Christian thought and the ideal of martyrdom, and the reckless romantic idealism of wartime intellectual culture.

As soon as Suzuki has quoted the wartime motif of the ‘virgin soldier’, he sets out to undermine it. Firstly, the ‘pure’ Kiroku is as much a compulsive masturbator as he is a compulsive fighter. The film’s comedic emphasis on masturbation mocks the ideal of (martial) masculinity as not only narcissistic, but literally auto-erotic. Secondly, Kiroku’s ‘love’ for Michiko is actually pure lust which, having no outlet, stokes itself into masturbatory fury through the language and forms of romantic idealism. In a culture of denial of the body, Kiroku is too buttoned up to touch

<sup>50</sup> Standish, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> Standish, pp. 37, 82, 89.

<sup>52</sup> Tanabe was the single author most extensively read by the *kamikaze* pilots and doubtless by other servicemen as well, and ‘delivered the now infamous speech on May 19, 1943...advocating the intellectual’s involvement in society as a means to change society. For the students, his message was to go to war’: Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 5. Dr. Nitobe Inazō created the most influential modern retelling of the myth of the samurai ‘code,’ yet imported such concepts as European medieval chivalry into the mix: see G. Cameron Hurst III, ‘Death, Honour and Loyalty: The Bushidō Ideal,’ *Philosophy East and West* 40:4 (Oct. 1990), pp. 511-14, 516.

Michiko or propose anything of an amorous nature. He can only express lust by writing in his diary about romantic and spiritual longing for Michiko, after which writing he typically gets an erection, or must go out and fight to blow off steam. The famous scene in which Kiroku masturbates on Michiko's piano can be explained by this conflation of unconquerable biology and the *bourgeois* forms of culture through which desire was customarily channelled.



7:26 'Sex' and the Middle Class: 1930s student Kiroku masturbates by playing piano with his member

### *Violence and militarism*

Other issues of interpretation are not as clear as the issue of sexual repression. Critics have widely disagreed on an ideological reading of the film's central motif of youthful brawling. While Tony Rayns and Alexander Jacoby have argued that the fighting in the film—which Kiroku considers as 'training' (for what he does not know)—is about 'the making of a model fascist,'<sup>53</sup> Satō Tadao and Ian Buruma are less judgmental of the protagonists's violence. The film, writes Buruma, is 'is literally an elegy...to the innocent violence of youth. It is a nostalgic yearning for the period in life when one can be self-assertive...before the hammer of conformity knocks the nail

<sup>53</sup> Rayns, essay for the 2005 Criterion collection DVD.

back in.’<sup>54</sup>

I am unable to make out the nostalgic film which Buruma claims to have seen. His interpretation views male biological aggression as one thing, and the patriarchal manipulation of it as another. This risks pulling the film back into those hegemonic pre-war discourses (on the ‘natural’ basis of male martial striving) from which Suzuki has attempted to break free.<sup>55</sup> Close textual reading suggests that Suzuki concedes little to biology (as opposed to ideology), instead indicating that youth violence and war violence are essentially the same thing.

Contra Buruma, the 16-year-old Kiroku does not simply engage in schoolyard fisticuffs or drunken brawling. He joins the school equivalent of a club for militant ultranationalists. The students imitate the pompous speeches and written declarations of military commanders, even, on one occasion, summoning fighters with an ancient gong. They wear club insignia replete with war symbols (a major aspect of actual military culture).<sup>56</sup> And rather than using the weapons of school-sanctioned martial arts (i.e. bamboo swords), the students use hidden razor blades and construct hand-made spikes made from the metal cleats of their track shoes.

Despite the film’s tone of comedic irony, Kiroku’s fighting has serious consequences: expulsion, delinquency, and, eventually, enlistment in the army. Moreover, *Kenka erejii* dwells obsessively on the bodily damage sustained in Kiroku’s fights, visualised graphically and often in extreme close-up. Shoe cleats are driven through one character’s cheek; Kiroku bites off an ear. The student fights occupy an uncomfortable grey area between a fist-fight and actual combat to the death. The boundary between juvenile behaviour and war is indeed unclear when we consider the extreme youth of so many enlisted servicemen in the Pacific War.

<sup>54</sup> Buruma, *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains of Japanese Culture* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 146

<sup>55</sup> cf. Standish’s brief interpretation, p. *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 123.

<sup>56</sup> Ohunki-Tierney, p.109.

Kiroku's obsession with fighting is clearly an allegory of the militarist culture of his elders. Kiroku's club leader is both an ideologue and a coward who manipulates the junior members into fighting in his place. This is a blatant satire of the wartime military hierarchy. The fact that the character is called Takuan, the name of the priest who legendarily trained Miyamoto Musashi in the martial arts, is an additional swipe at both martial myth and popular film culture.<sup>57</sup>

The reality of war is brought home in the film's final sequence, in which Michiko runs away from the cold Kiroku who, resolved to remain undistracted by female attachment, does not follow her. Outside in the snow, Michiko is framed in a close-up, while in the background a troop of young soldiers are rushing along the narrow road, heading to war. They are pushing her up against a barbed-wire stockade fence (another instance of war iconography). Two further troops march by, after which we find Michiko lying prostrate in the snow. She has either been trampled underfoot or, like femininity itself, violently shunted aside in this unforgettable allegory of the brutality of militarism.



7:27 Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Women Under Militarism: Michiko shunted aside and then trampled by columns of rushing troops (background)

<sup>57</sup> Among the many popular film versions of this story both during and after the war, Inagaki Hiroshi's *Miyamoto Musashi* trilogy from 1940-42 for Tōhō was arguably the most influential.

### *Violence and Patriarchy*

*Kenka erejii* also explores the meaning of male violence in a patriarchal society. The Japanese military state, from the 1880s to 1945, was explicitly predicated on the conflation of the family sphere and the sphere of political authority; filial piety was equated with duty to the emperor as father of all, and many servicemen took this to heart.<sup>58</sup> Recalling the 1936 revolt of the young officers, met with incomprehension and rage by the emperor in whose name they revolted, *Kenka erejii* depicts wartime relations between youth and patriarchy as anything but harmonious. As Kiroku's fighting prowess grows, he challenges the authority of his club *senpai*, his school teachers, principals, even his military training officer. The naïve Kiroku assumes that the basis of authority, indeed the basis of all social relations, is strength. In response to his challenge, Kiroku is punished and expelled; his father confronts him, supposedly in order to reign in his wildness. Instead, the father's indulgent attitude only encourages Kiroku to continue on this path. The very patriarchy now disturbed by Kiroku has instilled in him these ideals.

As in *Tokyo nagaremono*, patriarchy is both arbitrary in its wielding of authority and deeply contradictory at heart. The conflict is one of honour versus order, or social control at odds with a long history of idealized male competition. When Kiroku meets the stiff and pompous headmaster (Tamagawa Isao) of his new school in Aizu, a region that is proud of its samurai past, the headmaster points to a plaque on the wall which declares the importance of 'seemliness'. But when Kiroku wreaks havoc with the Aizu kendo club, the headmaster becomes as childishly indulgent as Kiroku's father: he digs out his old kendo *shinai* and challenges Kiroku to a practice duel. Brushing away his subordinate's objections about the 'unseemliness' of this

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<sup>58</sup> Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, pp. 145-148; Kathleen S. Uno, 'The Death of "Good wife, Wise Mother"?'; in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Post-war Japan as History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1993), pp. 296-98; Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 78.



behaviour, he asserts, 'One must be a man above all.' Clearly, the bureaucratic demand for seamliness and order is another façade. Underneath, the ordinary man understands, and even longs for, Kiroku's violent nature. While youth play at being virile soldiers, Suzuki's adults wish to become children again. Japanese society is in arrested development.

### *Violence and Romantic Idealism*

Kiroku lives in a world of ideological fantasy. In one scene he is sitting on the right of screen with his diary while Michiko plays piano on the left. On the *shōji* behind Michiko is a bizarre, non-diegetic pattern of swirling light. Kiroku gets an erection, looks out the window, and stiffly walks off to the right. As Kiroku thrusts open a set of doors, the area outside the house is covered in a blinding white. Kiroku boldly strides into this haze, through which the viewer makes out a wooded area where two students are waiting for him.



7:28 Violence and Sexual Fantasy, Shot (1): Kiroku fighting in an orgiastic white haze: reality or masturbatory fantasy?

As Kiroku begins to fight them, the oversaturated whiteness begins to fade away, but instead of clarity, the shot dissolves into a close-up on Kiroku's diary, expressing his desire for Michiko. This followed by two further shots of Kiroku fighting. During the

second shot, the camera suddenly flash-pans back into the house to rest on a *shōji* through which Kiroku enters, looking happy and refreshed. How could he have moved so quickly from one place to the other?



7:29 Violence and Sexual Fantasy, (Shot 4a): a fade-in from Kiroku's diary to Kiroku, continuing his fight outside



7:30 Violence, Fantasy, and False Time, (Shot 4b): the same shot finds Kiroku entering the house after a flash-pan to the left: how could he have moved so quickly?

As he sits down, the framing duplicates that of the first shot, but there is now no swirling pattern behind Michiko, only blackness. The scene's audacious non-diegetic lighting, oversaturation, and spatial impossibilities give it a dreamlike quality. Why does Suzuki cut back to Kiroku's diary? Is the fight scene only a fantasy in Kiroku's

head? Or is the diary an expression of his romantic thoughts during an actual fight? Did Kiroku actually leave the room to masturbate, while the film shows us fighting as a non-diegetic metaphor? It is impossible to decide between these, but Suzuki has clearly expressed that Kiroku lives in a fantasy world where libidinal energy translates to romantic/martial idealism.

One could make the argument that wartime Japan was similarly trapped in a haze of ideological fantasy. This was as true of the intellectual culture as it was of the nation's optimistic military commanders:<sup>59</sup>

In 1943, the major journal of Japan's romantic movement, *Cogito*, which became colossally tied with ultra-nationalism, was launched. *Les liaisons dangereuses* between the intellectual...community and ultra-nationalism...were forming. Of critical importance is the emphasis on aesthetics...which pilots projected onto their...patriotism, using it to justify their sacrifice as a...beautiful act.<sup>60</sup>

For Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, these idealistic servicemen sought an 'aesthetics...of life.' They were also, like Kiroku, mostly single, young men.

Kiroku's reason for fighting is every bit as phantasmagorical as that of the *tokkōtai* pilots. Kiroku challenges another student on the streets of Aizu by asking a question: What should a man do if he is in the middle of a street and a bus comes toward him? The student answers that he would step aside. Kiroku begs to differ: 'You should be hit by the bus rather than move out of its way.' Kiroku's naïve idealism has transformed the socially accepted militarism of his time, which was rigorously conformist, into a fanatical, non-conformist religion of strength, impossible to practice on a social scale. His creativity, unhampered by knowledge or experience of the social and material realities of the adult world, takes militarism one step further from reality and drags the culture along with him.

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<sup>59</sup> The Prime Minister's Office and the Admiralty decided to go to war in December 1941 on the rationale that if they waited any longer than this, they would lack enough resources for a war. There was thus a prevailing naïve hope that a war with United States would be short and light on resources. Marius Jensen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2000), pp. 636-39.

<sup>60</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 5.

### *Violence and Aesthetic Iconography*

The importance of aesthetics to the patriotic idealism of Japanese servicemen is no doubt the reason why *Kenka erejii* begins with a montage of dynamic, pulsating nature imagery: ominous clouds in the sky, a rushing mountain stream,<sup>61</sup> and rolling seas.<sup>62</sup> These had been romantic symbols of Japanese nationalism from Meiji onwards.



7:31 Natural Imagery and Martial Training: Kiroku (kneeling foreground) receives military training from a self-proclaimed 'master' (left-of-centre background) in a mountain glade. Such iconic compositions would have been familiar to viewers of martial arts and *chanbara* films such as the *Miyamoto Musashi* variations

Ohnuki-Tierney has chronicled how social agents manipulated this ancient iconography for nationalist purposes, capitalizing on the operation of *méconnaissance*, by which the various meanings of complex cultural symbols could be conflated together or substituted for one another in the service of a state-sanctioned ideological programme. For example, cherry blossoms, which in Heian literature mainly signified youth and love, were gradually transformed into something amenable to the military

<sup>61</sup> Mountain imagery in Japanese culture relates to a long, complex and hybrid tradition of mountain worship. Ohnuki-Tierney reminds us that the Meiji oligarchy's 'Imperial Rescript to Soldiers (*gunjin chokuyū*)...linked mountain worship to imperial duty' in saying that the 'obligation [to the emperor] is heavier than the mountain but death is lighter than a feather (p. 62).'

<sup>62</sup> Water imagery was so associated with the military in the culture at large that a post-war academic volume of writings left behind by students soldiers was entitled *Listen to the Voices of the Sea Gods*: Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 188.

regime: ‘falling like a beautiful cherry petal’ was the metaphor the Japanese state used to promote the sacrifice of soldiers for the emperor *qua* state.’<sup>63</sup> Countless servicemen in the Pacific War would console themselves and strengthen their resolve with the idea that their death would be aesthetically beautiful ‘like falling cherry petals’—one of the commonest phrases in the writings they left behind.

*Kenka erejii* uses the iconography of cherry blossoms to demonstrate the relation between nationalism, idealized masculinity, and the rejection of the feminine. Kiroku is taking an evening stroll with Michiko through the cherry trees, with the camera tracking through the luxurious blossoms above to represent their POV. Thus far the blossoms preserve their ancient connotation of youth and courtship. But when Kiroku touches Michiko’s hand for the first time, disaster ensues. Suddenly his ultranationalist club leader appears from under the cherry blossoms, signifying their transformation into icons of male martial valour. The leader denounces Kiroku for having contact with a woman. In a panic, Kiroku pushes Michiko aside and runs toward the leader, a jump cut signifying his crisis of values. Kiroku pretends Michiko is his sister. When the leader discovers the lie and declares a feud between them, he smacks the cherry tree with his sword.



7:32 Symbolic *Méconnaissance*: falling cherry blossoms (once a symbol of courtly romance, later of death and self-sacrifice) after an encounter with a bully disrupts Kiroku's courtship

<sup>63</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, p. 38.

The falling petals humorously signify the collapse of Kiroku's romantic idyll and his choice of fighting over women. It is a turning point for the worse.

Suzuki submits imperialist iconography to the same ironic treatment to which he submitted advertising and mass culture in *Tokyo nagaremono*. At one point *Kenka erejii* makes an explicit link between the two regimes: while Kiroku is sneaking out to fight a battle, Suzuki cuts away to a non-diegetic cartoon illustration of a Western cowboy.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In The Violence Trilogy, Suzuki drives a wedge between youthful male violence and the repressive violence of patriarchy, while at the same time making clear that they are both informed by the same mythic and gendered structures of thought. Certainly the director admires youthful non-conformism: but it must be founded on negative ethics and not on idealism. Kiroku is a dupe of repressive ideology and will die in the war, while Tetsu is eternally lonely. Only a transformation of society's gender dynamics (as we shall find in *Koroshi no rakuin*) holds out hope.

Is it possible to escape the grip of a society's consensual reality, even when it turns delusional? What is the role of the cinema itself, with its representation of sexuality and violence, in this process? Normatively, cinema reflects consensus, and the *yakuza eiga* did so despite its subject of rightist rebellion. In Suzuki's first two Violence films we see the formation of an alternative practice. One alternative is to visualise the hidden repressions unacknowledged by patriarchy concerning the sexual basis of violence, in the hopes that cinema might possibly exorcise it (a mass catharsis). Simultaneously, though, Suzuki amongst others in the 1960s proposed a non-cathartic possibility: an advanced cinematic ethics of living and dying without

delusion. This answer lay in attacking the spatial, temporal, and narrational systems by which a consensual 'reality' is reified on the screen.

*Tokyo nagaremono* strides the line between a classical cinema of continuity and narrative pleasure and a differential 'new wave' cinema based on the possibilities of discontinuity and non-diegetic gesture. Often the film remains just inside the line (for example, the car chase discussed in Part One preserves a basic spatial clarity and constant screen direction). Yet Suzuki begins to explore the use of spectacle that depends not on diegesis, but on iconicity, for viewer comprehension. During the barroom brawl, a spectacle of comic excess, a lady in French can-can dress is hanging from the rafters. A grizzled sailor on the floor looks up to take a peek under her dress, but a gallon of white cream suddenly descends on his head. The hypertextual reference is the slapstick pie fight, but here the motif becomes scatological. It is also a diegetic impossibility, while Kiroku's fight, discussed in Part Two, presents a spatio-temporal impossibility on top of this. Using 'gags' such as these to make a satirical point, Suzuki announces his freedom to break the rules.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: VARIETIES OF NEGATIVITY IN *KOROSHI NO RAKUIN*

### INTRODUCTION: NEGATIVITY AND SURREALISM

*Koroshi no rakuin/Branded to Kill* (1967) is a film in negative. At one remarkable moment in the film, four long shots of the Tokyo cityscape are *actually* shown in negative, that is to say, the negative film stock is displayed on the screen rather than the expected 'positive' footage:

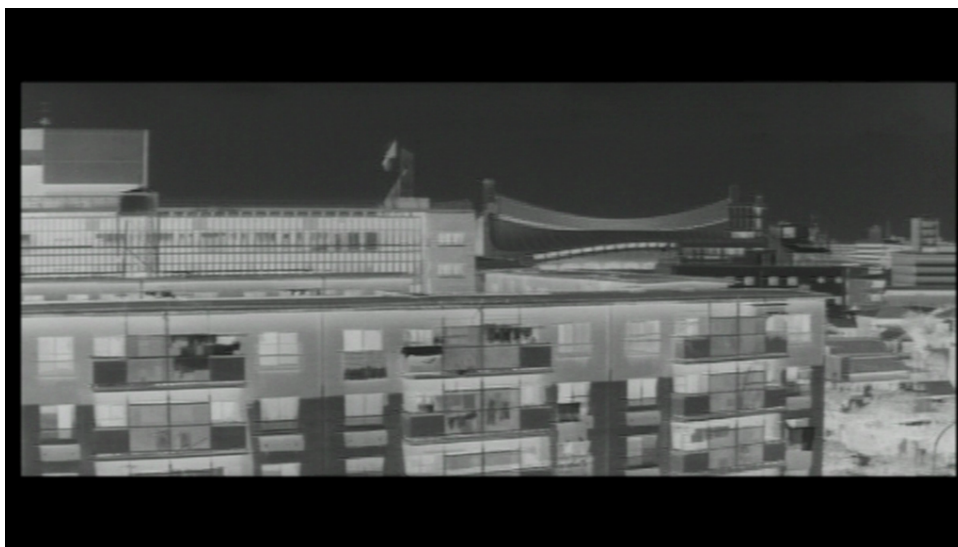


8:1 Cinematic Negativity, Shot (1): the negative film stock of a disorienting, aimless pan across an apartment high rise on the newly redeveloped *yamanote* (Western) side of Tokyo





8.2 Cinematic Negativity, Shot (3): right pan with a rushing Shinkansen bullet train, a 1960s symbol of Japanese economic progress through technology



8.3 Cinematic Negativity, Shot (4): moving in the same direction, a fourth negative pan shot across the roof of Yoyogi Gymnasium, the iconic centerpiece of the 1964 Olympic Games.

True to the preoccupations of *Tokyo nagaremono* and his self-proclaimed ‘destructive’ tendency,<sup>1</sup> Suzuki portrays 1960s Tokyo and the ‘progress’ ideology of the economic miracle in a highly ‘negative’ light. In this film, the massive, unpopular,

<sup>1</sup> Suzuki in Satō Tadao, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), p. 224.

authoritarian urban renewal program before and after the 1964 Tokyo Olympics is shown to have resulted in a stark, empty wasteland of concrete.

Suzuki's oppositional struggle for a radical freedom of cinematic expression not only negates post-war Tokyo, but the film itself, ideologically and formally. The reception of *Koroshi no rakuin*, a 'quota quickie' scripted, planned, and shot in a few months to fill a hole in Nikkatsu's release schedule, was also resoundingly negative, resulting in the end of Suzuki's studio career and the virtual burial of the film by its own studio. Nikkatsu president Hori Kyūsaku famously called the film 'incomprehensible' (see Chapter One) while *Eiga geijutsu* complained that 'we do not go to the cinemas to be puzzled.'<sup>2</sup> All these negativities would be only incidental, a mere accident of reception, if the film text itself was not marked by a relentlessly negative aesthetic on multiple levels. This being so, parallels between the aesthetic of destruction within the film and the social destruction *of* the film have become inevitable: each contributed to the other.

The first part of this chapter discusses how Suzuki extends his overarching ideological theme of the dissolution of Japanese masculinity to a consideration of studio filmmaking itself, establishing an 'ideological complicity' between post-war society and the 'masculine' crime thriller, and undermining that very ground. Masculinity and generic iconography are alike related to a third term, the victory of post-war capitalism. The second part of this chapter likens the formal construction of *Koroshi no rakuin* to a black whirlpool, an ingenious *mise-en-abyme* of endless self-negation, an extreme but appropriate device for a film that crystallizes a genre based in death. In this section I chart various formal and structural 'movements' of negativity such as *invisibility*, *reversal*, and *interruption*. The third section applies the

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<sup>2</sup> translated in Daisuke Miyao, 'Dark Visions of Japanese *film noir*' in Alistair Phillips and Julian Stringer, eds., *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 193.

philosophy of Deleuze to understand the significance of Suzuki's negative aesthetic—especially its lynchpin, discontinuity editing—within a decisive transnational moment of departure from the classical cinema: the late 1960s.

In the remainder of this introduction I briefly discuss two aesthetic sources of Suzuki's negativity: surrealism and *film noir*. While the 1967 *nuberu bagu* films of Yoshida expounded Sartrean existentialism and those of Ōshima channelled Brechtian theatre, Suzuki responded to cinema's political and representational crisis of the late 1960s by a profound return to a different branch of the pre-war avant-garde:<sup>3</sup> French and Japanese surrealism. Suzuki has assented to the label of surrealism and this is only fitting considering surrealism's formative influence on the post-war hard-boiled fiction and *film noir* that had in turn inspired Nikkatsu.<sup>4</sup> But it was in *Koroshi no rakuin* that he channelled surrealism directly as a springboard for his attempt to stretch (or destroy) the boundaries of narrative film practice.

While no doubt mindful of the Japanese surrealism (*chōgenjitsushugi*) of the Taishō era, *Koroshi no rakuin* shows the direct influence of the cinema of Buñuel. Daisuke Miyao noted an homage to *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel and Dali, 1929), a close-up of an eyeball pulled out of its socket by a criminal optometrist.<sup>5</sup> Suzuki may also have seen their *L'âge d'Or* (1930), which played in Tokyo art theatres in the 1960s and excited the attention of film magazines and *nuberu bagu* directors.<sup>6</sup> Whether consciously or not, Suzuki synthesizes the genital symbolism of the former Buñuel film with the scatological motif of the latter one. In *Un Chien Andalou*, the heroine's underarm hair famously disappears and reappears as a moustache. Both are,

<sup>3</sup> Isolde Standish, *Porn, Politics, and Protest* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Suzuki in Mark Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 102; James Naremore, *More Than Night* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), pp. 17-25, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Miyao, 'Dark Visions of Japanese *film noir*' in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer, eds., *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Tanemura Suehiro, 'Ruizu bunyueru ron' *Eiga geijutsu*, May 1966, pp. 20-22; Ōshima among others is known to have corresponded about the film: Ōshima, *Cinema, Censorship and the State* (MIT Press, 1992), p. 112.

of course, metaphors for pubic hair. In *Koroshi no rakuin*, as the psychotic Hanada (Shishido Jō) shoots his wife (Ogawa Mariko) in the breast and vagina, her corpse falls into the toilet and her black hair is flushed down.



8:4 Surrealism and Abjection: hair-as-feces links gendered violence and body horror

This abject scene of gendered violence sets up a surrealist transformation that reveals the pathological basis of Hanada's misogyny; as he enters a restaurant bathroom in a panic, he encounters a disfigured man flushing a toilet which is filled with black hair rather than feces. Hanada backs away in utter horror as the voice of his dead wife cries 'We are beasts!' on the soundtrack. It is Hanada's reactionary terror of the (gendered) body, in all its biological functions, that drives him to kill, to negate.



8:5 Surrealist Transformation: feces-as-hair and the horror of the (gendered) body

This return to surrealism did not occur in a cultural vacuum, but within the ferment of the 1960s Tokyo avant-garde.<sup>7</sup> The screenwriter and novelist Abe Kōbō had formed a surrealist club at Tokyo University in the 1950s. Miryam Sas has briefly discussed the surrealist influence on the playwright/filmmaker Terayama Shūji,<sup>8</sup> whose play *Kegawa no mari/Mari in Furs* (1967) utilizes the feminine, metamorphic symbol of the butterfly that Suzuki applies so brilliantly to the character of Misako in *Koroshi no rakuin*.<sup>9</sup> Kazuki Koroï's remarkable but briefly seen *Tobenai chinmoku/Silence Has No Wings* (1966), the only cinematic release in Japan which can be confidently said to have pre-dated the non-diegetic avant-gardism and discontinuity of *Koroshi no rakuin*, was also dominated by a butterfly metaphor and also demonstrated a surrealist bent.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese surrealism* (Stanford University Press, c1999), pp. 159-177. The influential surrealist poet and art critic Takiguchi Shūzō evaded the notorious persecution or 'conversion' of Japanese surrealist and other avant-garde artists in the 1930s, in order to become a prominent post-war intellectual and father figure to the 1950s Tokyo avant-garde.

<sup>8</sup> Sas, *Fault Lines*, pp. 159, 166.

<sup>9</sup> Sas, *Experimental Arts in Post-war Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 2011), pp. 39-42.



8:6 Butterflies and the Avant-Garde: surrealism and metaphors of femininity in the independent 1966 production  
*Tobenai chinmoku*



8:7 The Butterflies of Death: *Koroshi no rakuin*'s dessicated butterflies associate radical femininity and radical negativity

Like these avant-garde works, *Koroshi no rakuin* explicitly related a surrealist spirit of rebellion and radical alterity to the ferment of the New Left leading up to the mass student demonstrations of 1968. Suzuki was, as ever, mindful of Taishō culture, and when encouraged by his assistants (Yamatoya Atsushi and Tanaka Yōzō) in the

Guryū Hachirō circle that wrote and produced *Koroshi no rakuin* with him, he used Taishō surrealism as his meeting point with the agitational leftism of 1967.<sup>10</sup>

The importance to Japanese surrealism of the ‘negative aesthetic’ cannot be emphasised enough. Takiguchi Shūzō called art ‘an act of destruction...to fulfil the aims of poetry’.<sup>11</sup> The poet Kitasono Katsue viewed surrealism as the material and skill employed to produce a ‘vacuum tube,’ that is, ‘nothing at all....The work that leads to this vacuum is the essence of art.’<sup>12</sup> Sas reminds us that Kitasono’s term for ‘vacuum’ (*shinkū*) is also the Buddhist term for ‘the void.’ The writings of the Buddhist-educated Koga Harue, who promoted surrealism as a form of liberating ‘self-extinction,’ illustrates how French surrealism’s negative aesthetics were quickly, if controversially, interpreted by many Japanese artists according to the Buddhist theology of nothingness<sup>13</sup>, another resource which Suzuki had at his disposal.

The 1920s poet Kanbara Tai declared that ‘there is no poetry, no painting, no music. What exists is creation only. Art is absolutely free. The freedom of its form is absolute. Say, nerve, reason, sense, sound, smell, light, colour, desire, movement, pressure...there is nothing that does not fit the content of art.’<sup>14</sup> In this declaration of the radical freedom of artistic subjectivity, representation and generic distinctions collapse not only into a democratic heterodoxy but devolve into fundamental sensible and tonal relations. *Koroshi no rakuin* is a similar exercise in ‘getting back to basics,’ a devolution of film narration into (deceptively) ‘crude’ forms, with a minimum of continuity in time and space necessary for viewers to comprehend the trajectory of the protagonist. This looseness has the effect of emphasizing ‘pure’ sounds and images (the pure *sonsigns* and *opsigns* of Deleuze). On this level of spectacle, the impression

<sup>10</sup> Suzuki displayed a calculating consciousness of the era in Schilling, p. 102

<sup>11</sup> in Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 30.

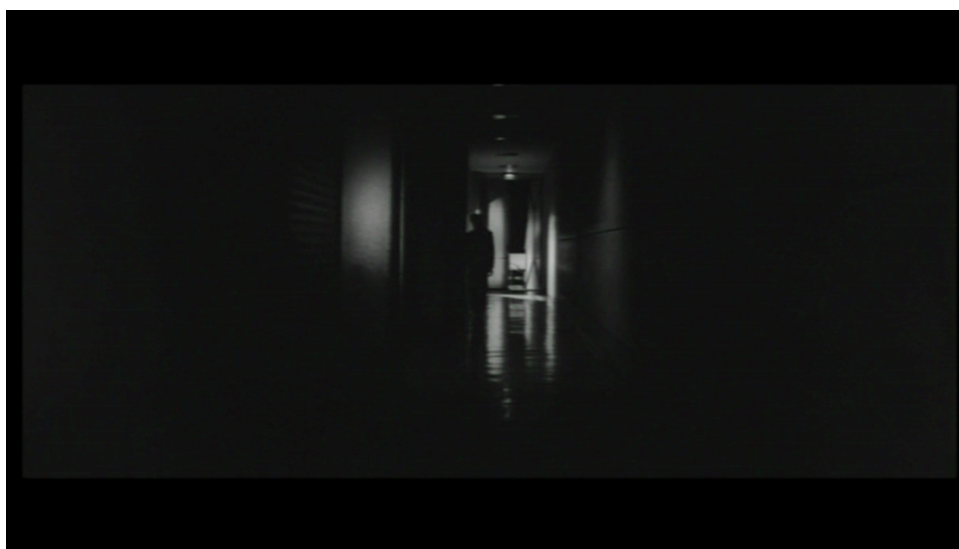
<sup>12</sup> Sas, *Fault Lines*, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> John Clark, *Surrealism in Japan* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> translated in John Clark, *Surrealism in Japan*, p. 20. Kanbara was not a surrealist but a futurist and highly influential figure of the 1920s avant-garde.

of spontaneous experiment is essential, yet deceptive. Nagatsuka Kazue's low-key lighting is highly complex even when welded to a 'free-for-all' compositional strategy that increasingly displaces the classical 'centred' representation of characters and actions in favour of shots of feet at the top of the frame, or heads at the bottom. A surrealist ethic of impertinence enables Suzuki to push transnational hard-boiled fiction to a point of *sine qua non*, a collapse of generic and narrative integrity into the sensible and metaphorical.

As Miyao and Anthony Antoniou have noted, *Koroshi no rakuin* is also steeped in the history of surrealism's American descendent, the *film noir*. Indeed, of all Suzuki's films, *Koroshi no rakuin* is the most explicitly referential to American crime films. Particular scenes, including the murder of Mami Hanada, not only utilize low-key and non-diegetic lighting effects but 'quote' such iconic visual motifs of *noir* as the back-lit silhouette of a killer walking down a long corridor.



8:8 Icons of *Noir*: the silhouette of a killer



Most importantly, Suzuki extends the generic and iconic reflexivity of *Tokyo nagaremono* to a new level of metatextual or hypertextual reference, unheard for a studio film of 1967: as Hanada looks out on the Tokyo cityscape, he begins to believe that he can become Japan's Number One Killer and take over the criminal Organisation that is hunting him down. The voice of Richard Widmark, from Dassin's *Night and the City* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1950) is suddenly heard on the soundtrack, crying 'I'm Champion!' again and again. Widmark's character, Harry Fabian, is a misguided and ill-fated loser, and the point being made is perhaps that Hanada, for all his talent, is also a loser, his ambitions nothing more than pipe dreams; or what is perhaps more revealing, that he is playing a losing game.

## I. CRIMINALITY, IDEOLOGY, SATIRE

### *Hanada Goro: The Performance of Japanese Masculinity*

*Koroshi no rakuin* distils the many varieties of Nikkatsu *akushon* into a cold, basic scenario about a heartless, murderous thug whose deluded, egoistic quest for underworld supremacy ends in his own death. The charm, magnetism and attraction of the amoral gangster as 'tragic hero'<sup>15</sup> is replaced by the often comical pathos and neurosis of Shishido Jō's anti-hero Hanada. Hanada can be usefully contrasted to *ninkyō* heroes Takakura Ken and Tsuruta Kōji who, in Tōei's biggest hits of the 1960s, radiated a cool professionalism and physical stoicism that evidently translated to sexual glamour for audiences. In place of statuesque handsomeness and a merely implicit cruelty, Shishido's Hanada communicates an ugly, brutal masculinity. It

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<sup>15</sup> The 'Gangster as Tragic Hero' is the title of Robert Warshow's famous interpretation of 1930s Hollywood gangster movies, reprinted in James Ursini and Alain Silver, eds., *The Gangster Film Reader* (New Jersey, Limelight editions, 2007), pp. 11-18. Some films of the gangster cycle, particularly Von Sternberg's *Underworld* (Paramount 1927), had been hugely influential in Japan. There is also certain physical resemblance between Shishido's character and the equally dark, bestial Tony Comante of Hawk's *Scarface* (Universal, 1932).

could be said that Shishido's repellant protagonist, anticipating the ugliness of criminal life in Fukusaku's *jitsuroku* (true account) gang films of the 1970s, wipes the 'shine' off of the icon of the *yakuza* in order to show the 'seam.' In *Yajū no seishun*, Shishido had already occupied a grey area between 'law and order' (the hard-boiled detective) and lawless perversity. Here, Shishido embodies a sort of negative synthesis, a brutish, perverse criminal incarnate, without decency or excuses.

The first thing one notices about Hanada, as he climbs into a limo in the second shot of the film, is that he is constantly playing a role. Every component of his visual persona is a movie cliché, a reflexive gesture. His expensive black suit never gets dirty and his black trench coat signifies both professionalism and coldness. Most notable are the large black sunglasses, always a significant motif in Suzuki's crime films. They communicate a cruel and inviolate remoteness, but also the self-assertion of power. Hanada expects to be looked at and attended to (without saying a word), but will not lower himself to be seen looking back. With his oversized glasses, puffy, scarred cheeks, and a pasty complexion overemphasised by the harsh top lighting of his first several close-ups, Shishido looks like a demon (*oni*) or ghost (*obake*) from folklore.



8:9 The Protagonist as Demon: the killer wreathed in smoke as he sniffs boiled rice

Hanada's performance of himself as a virtually un-socialized, inhuman killer is a façade that will be stripped away with clinical detachment by Suzuki, as Hanada falls in love and is revealed to be 'only human' after all. This humanity—in the form of a paranoid, love-sick wreckage inciting, by degrees, the viewer's pity and scorn—goes as quickly as it comes, as Hanada, unable to stand his own weakness under the harsh light of society's patriarchal structures of judgment, turns to murdering women and embroils himself in a sadomasochistic duel with his superior in order to prove himself.

Nevertheless, Shishido imparts to this character, in visual terms, a peculiar variety of sexual charisma. Semi-nude for nearly half of the film, he projects the dangerous attraction of a snake or a wolf. Hanada's wife Mami confirms his monstrosity: 'My husband is a dreadful (*osoroshii*) man,' she says with an obvious sexual relish. Suzuki insists quite early in the film on Hanada's highly repressed, and exclusively fetishistic, sexuality, centred on his addiction to the smell of boiled rice. In a later sequence, Hanada is sniffing rice as his nude wife emerges from the shower.

Thanks to the rice, Hanada suddenly stands ‘erect’ and chases after her. Hanada’s sexuality, too, is almost entirely a matter of performance. The sex scene between the newlyweds is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the ideological determination of sexuality. Through his rice fetish, Hanada is literally ‘steeling himself’ for playing his role, a performance for Mami, for the audience, and for himself.

Brutality is the only aspect of intercourse which seems to galvanize Hanada. Mami is the objectified and subjugated target of blows and of penetration from Hanada as the active, sadistic male.



8:10: Sex and Subjugation: out of control smothering and savage blows *almost* terrify the irrepressible Mami Hanada (Ogawa Mariko)

This energetic performance is passionless and non-committal: the ‘inpenetrable’ male never risks losing control of the situation (as he will shortly do with Misako). Sex is reduced to an obligatory ritual of the containment of the feminine. Yet Hanada’s comical dependence on rice-sniffing, in order to get up the will-power for intercourse, is a satirical negation of his posture of strength. When Hanada hides out in Misako’s

apartment and she, unlike Mami, denies him his rice, Hanada breaks down like a sulking, histrionic child, thus finally bringing about the loss of (gender) control that the male 'professional' fears most.

Although one of Suzuki's notorious 'open-metaphors,' Hanada's rice-sniffing is perhaps, among other things, a nostalgic reversion to adolescent sexuality and to Japan's past. Ohnuki-Tierney extrapolates the modern symbology of rice from its ancient, sacred status as a sustenance crop: 'the aesthetics of rice lies in its luster as well as in its whiteness and purity. They...ultimately derive from its religious nature....Motōri Norinaga...discerned the superiority of Japan...in the superiority of its rice and cherry blossoms.'<sup>16</sup> Within a dehumanized urban milieu, the smell of boiled rice may likely signify for Hanada the mythical space of rural, hometown (*furusato*) Japan. Since Hanada's childhood would have been in the 1940s, therefore displaced by the war, the *gestus* of the boiled rice may evoke a naïve longing for the pre-war, rural, implicitly imperial past that characterized much of post-war studio cinema.

### *Masculinity as Capitalism*

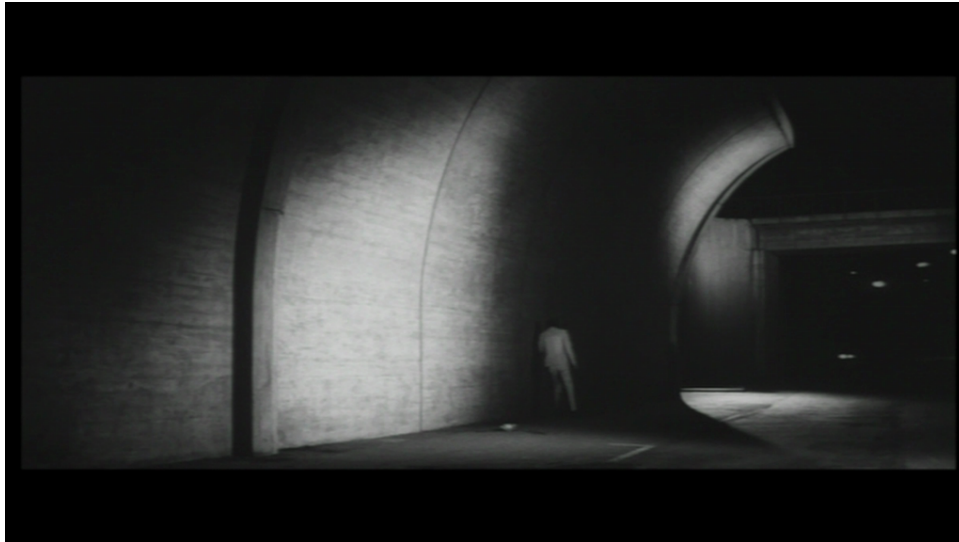
The most important aspect of Hanada's character is his all-consuming professional competitiveness. This is perhaps the principal argument of the film: the ethic of competition as an allegory for Japan's transformation into a player in global capitalism. The whimsical obsession of the killers with their 'ranking' is, among other things, satirically reminiscent of the life of the 1960s *sarariman*, forever caught up in anxious relations with superiors and inferiors. Hanada's own hypersensitivity to position, to judging whether a man is better or worse than he, becomes more and more acute, drowning out sex and relationships. By the end of the film, Hanada literally

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<sup>16</sup> Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 131.

murders the possibility of anything else in his life when he ‘accidentally’ shoots his only love, Misako, in a wild attempt to defeat Number One. So, in Suzuki’s social equation, one may succeed (temporarily) in capitalism’s game of life, yet lose all else in doing so.

Hanada’s fetishisation of professionalism is established in comparison to his alcoholic partner Kasuga (Minami Hiroshi) who has lost his confidence and can barely hold a gun. He obsesses over his violation of the assassin’s code: ‘Drink and Women Kill a Killer.’ This code is remarkable in its simplicity. Compared to the unspoken, situational, but elaborate code of honour in the *ninkyō eiga*, the ‘code’ at work here is a piece of crude, essentialist masculine posturing. It constitutes nothing more ethical than an imaginary prescription for self-preservation achieved at the expense of the Other (the female) who signifies a loss of boundaries. A killer must never lose control, especially through sex: to break this abstemious code is considered by other killers not only as proof of incompetence, but, paradoxically, as loss of virility. Suzuki expresses Kasuga’s ‘impotence’ with brilliant visual economy: for instance, his manner of stopping short with the car. When Hanada slaps his old friend with pained contempt, this is the final humiliation for the self-loathing Kasuga, who no longer feels himself to be a ‘man’: honorific redemption through suicide seems the only way out. Gun in hand, Kasuga takes a running leap down a dark underpass at the end of which waits killer Number Four. The oft-seen tunnel or underpass, a negative symbol of industrial development with obvious sexual connotations, becomes the film’s dominant metaphor for the (perceived) loss of masculinity.



8:11 The Tunnel: the downward slide of male competition

After executing Kasuga, the smartly dressed Number Four turns around, walks a few steps, and drops dead from Kasuga's bullet. After death, he pulls his immaculate white coat over his own head. This fantastic gesture is Brechtian in its import to the argument of the film. Violence is not simply reducible to male competition on a biological level, but operates within a ritualised ideological system. It compels behaviour regardless of personal impulse. In this final 'case study' of the 'Violence Trilogy,' the divorce between naturalism and ideology illustrated by Kasuga is also channelled through the conflict of world-view between Hanada and Mami. The only character in the film more interested in survival than death, Mami views humanity, not unreasonably, as purely bestial. But Hanada is attached to a vision of human/corporate 'progress,' a dream of beating the odds and becoming Number One. At his finest moment, when he has ingeniously defeated five Organisation agents at the harbour, Hanada's 'left-handed' dream of success in the criminal 'business' is visualised in the form of an American aircraft carrier passing by, while jaunty pop music plays over the soundtrack; it is likened to the Japan of the

economic miracle and its disavowing fantasy of regeneration through American-style capitalism.



8:12: Political Allegory: Who is Number One? U.S. aircraft carriers pass by at the moment of Hanada's 'professional' high point

### *Training for Power*

When Hanada holes up in Misako's apartment, unable to leave for fear of Number One's sniper bullet, the latter passes up countless opportunities to kill Hanada, preferring to call him on the phone and offer advice ('Eat more proteins'), or to belittle him with droll, suggestive remarks. Number One's cat and mouse game with Hanada begins to resemble not a duel, but the master-apprentice training of countless *chanbara* films (e.g. the many versions of *Miyamoto Musashi*). Number One, who is 'well endowed' with extraordinary techniques, is a nightmare vision of the patriarch, the castrating father/master who cruelly demands more than the child/apprentice can live up to. 'This posture most becomes you,' he says as Hanada bends down, his posterior in sight of Number One's crosshairs. The disavowed homoerotic subtext here is not incidental. In a contemporary exploration of the



‘erotics’ of male violence, the protagonist of the 1968 British film *Performance* shoots a gun into the camera lens itself as he proclaims, ‘I am a bullet,’ thus reinforcing his masculine ‘hardness’.



8:13 I am a Bullet (The Fetishisation of Violence): in *Performance* (1968/70), after being flagellated by a male ex-lover, the semi-nude Chas (James Fox) kills him with a bullet fired into the lens

In both films, the fetishism of maleness is elevated to a way of life through the practice of violence, which is a *jouissance*, an erotic substitute for both heterosexual intercourse, from which both protagonists either abstain or attempt to transform through sadism, and for homosexual contact, which both men will not allow themselves except in the substituted form of violence. But in the satirical *Koroshi no rakuin*, as Number One decides inexplicably that he and Hanada must eat, sleep, and even struggle to use the toilet together before they can resolve their duel, the homoerotic dynamic is played as a *reductio ad absurdum* mockery of the gangster, as the two killers farcically enact the rituals of heterosexual marriage.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the dictum ‘I am a bullet’ becomes clear when Number One espouses his philosophy of the professional killer. ‘I smell women’ he complains at one point. The comment leads to the following dialogue:

NO. 1: Let's talk about women to pass the time. You were in love with Misako?

HANADA: I don't know...I wasn't a perfect killer. I had a human weakness.

NO. 1: Yes. A killer must not be human. He must be tough and cold. He must not be affected by tenderness or loneliness.<sup>17</sup>

This dialogue illustrates a number of things. First, that there is no essential (that is, ideological) difference between Hanada and Number One, the anti-social Lone Wolf and the Corporate Leader. Satō has attempted to explain the attraction of the somewhat reactionary *ninkyō* films for leftist students: 'We have entered an era in which the assault on a big organisation by a small group in the name of justice is no longer doomed to failure.'<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the essence of *Koroshi no rakuin* as social satire, and as a variant of the politics of the *nuberu bagu*, is to turn Satō's opposition of lone wolf versus institution on its head. The man hunted by the Organisation also wants to lead it; the man at the top is profoundly more alone than the loner. They are motivated by the same ideology of masculinity. In this sense, *Koroshi no rakuin* offers a more sober political analysis than Wakamatsu's activist portraits of anti-social violence, such as *Okasareta hakuil/Violated Angels* (1967). This far less populist film, which sets out to offend and dehumanize its audience, nevertheless appoints a lone serial killer as a sort of political scourge of mainstream society viewed in exclusively feminine terms (his victims). For Suzuki, on the other hand, 'the Organisation'—the mirror of mainstream social organisation—is simply the psyche of the individual Japanese male (Wakamatsu's killer) writ terrifyingly large.

'The Organisation' is the negative image of all institutional power, and Number One makes explicit the ingrained misogyny that extends downwards from the ruling class. The torture of Misako confirms this. The scene is not presented to the audience directly but in the mediated, impersonal, and self-reflexive form of an 8mm film. Hanada watches the film as both a fascinated voyeur and a captive audience, and

<sup>17</sup> translation from the 1999 Criterion DVD edition of the film.

<sup>18</sup> Satō, *Currents of Japanese Cinema*, p. 53.

in this manner the scene cannot help but cast a negative reflection on gendered violence in genre cinema.



8:14 Reluctant Voyeur: Hanada despairs at the unbridgeable distance between himself and the screened violence

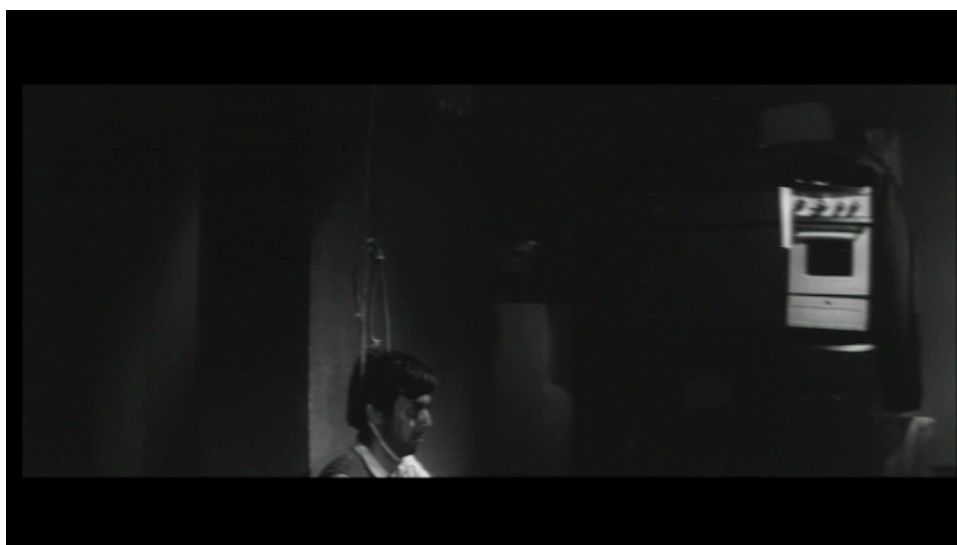
In the 8mm film, several middle-aged, well-dressed men from the Organisation watch from the safety of a glass booth, both voyeurs and remote controllers of the action.



8:15 The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie: well-dressed Organisation leaders operate torture devices from a glass booth

They are gazing at a naked Misako tied to a pole, the ultimate patriarchal totem. An automatic blow-torch on a robot arm is then applied to Misako's breasts and hair, transforming her into a bandaged, de-sexed, neutralized walking corpse. This is a literal and sadistic negation of the female carried out as a reflex of institutionalised misogyny. The scene spares no one from uncomfortable complicity: not the *yakuza*, not the legitimate (male) world of business, and not the makers and viewers of genre films.

The philosophy of Number One also reveals the most final negation: the rejection of the human in favour of the robot.<sup>19</sup> A killer must not need love or emotion, sleep or food. In order to achieve this 'inhumanity' Hanada puts himself into a noose that will strangle him if he falls asleep.



8:16 Training for Power: in extreme pursuit of 'hardness'

This sort of painful and masochistic male training is the recipe for competitive success as well as the ultimate protection from the feminine, the final phase of

<sup>19</sup> By 1967, robots were already a national obsession of the mass media youth culture, for example Tezuka Osamu's benign *Astroboy* manga and television series and Tsuburuya Eiji's rather violent *Ultraman* series, which debuted as *Urutora Q* in 1965.

masculine identity viewed as a search for almost supernatural ‘hardness’ stretching back to wartime ideology.<sup>20</sup> Hanada and Number One carry male performance to its logical conclusion. But, like the film itself (including the torture scene) this ironically overdetermined extremity is the route by which Suzuki achieves a social critique. The possibility of the negation of patriarchal ideology appears only because Suzuki has visualised, through these crystallized and fantastic gestures, the utter absurdity and impossibility of the masculine ideal.

In Suzuki’s film, Hanada has internalized the insane psychological demands of patriarchy well before the narrative begins. And yet *Koroshi no rakuin* is not a scenario of patriarchal succession. Hanada can only defeat his opponent through suicide. The dream of success remains elusive, even (or especially) for the talented. You cannot beat the system, i.e. the Organisation. Its ultimate victory may be that it draws out its most capable individuals (Hanada, Misako, Number One) in order to eliminate them in the name of stasis.

On this reading, Hanada’s decision to play ‘the game’—his deluded belief that he has a chance at winning—is the one and only cause of his downfall. The affair with Misako is viewed by Hanada as a nightmarish distraction from his *raison d’être*, but it may actually be a road not taken. Misako, who threatens to break out of her role as a projection of male anxiety, represents not only a radical independence from social mores and patriarchal oppression, but the freedom of choice itself, the ability to change.<sup>21</sup> She is superior to Hanada on the basis of the longstanding, Buddhist

<sup>20</sup> This ideological motif is also evident in the ‘post-modern’ Japanese cinema of the 1980s in which the fetishistic fusion of man and machine dominates the work of leading directors such as Tsukamoto Shinya, Oshii Mamoru, Ōtomo Kazuo, and even Miyazaki. Many of these films similarly appropriate imperial and pre-modern *topoi* of martial training and the master-apprentice dynamic. The screenwriter of Oshii’s *Kōkaku Kidōtai/Ghost in the Shell*, Itō Kazunori, was deeply influenced by *Koroshi no rakuin* (see the conclusion to this thesis) and wrote Suzuki’s belated semi-sequel to the film, *Pisutoru opera/Pistol Opera* (2001).

<sup>21</sup> Miyao notes a probable graphic match between the torture of Misako by fire and that of Dreyer’s Joan of Arc (*Le Passion de Jeanne D’Arc*, 1928); Miyao, ‘Dark Visions of Japanese *film noir*’, p. 201. Suzuki used this cinematic emblem of female martyrdom more explicitly in his next film, *Hishū monogatari/A Story of Sorrow* (1977).

cultural admonition against attachment. She also represents the directorial alter-ego: both insist on the omnipresence of death. ‘Where can I pin you?’ she asks, comparing Hanada to her butterflies. But Hanada has already been trapped, pinned down and dissected, with ironic detachment, by Suzuki himself. The inscrutable Misako is, like Suzuki’s film, like reality, in a continual state of flux: not even her obsession with butterflies remains constant, and her stubborn survival belies her touted death wish. But Hanada, like Suzuki’s post-war Japan, remains trapped in his dark tunnel, struggling towards the light while, conversely, pushing farther into darkness that will, eventually, submerge both characters.

## II. THE VARIETIES OF NEGATIVE STRUCTURE

### *Genre, Structure, and Farcical Negation*

Up to this point my chapter is in broad agreement with Watanabe Takenobu’s analysis of *Koroshi no rakuin*, although I have emphasised the aspects of authorship and politics that Watanabe deliberately ignores in his search for a general essence of *Nikkatsu akushon*.<sup>22</sup> Watanabe views the film as a reflexive film about genre, a ‘maximal accumulation’ of the mythic/generic elements familiar to Nikkatsu viewers,<sup>23</sup> yet pushing them towards abstraction and pure visual interest.<sup>24</sup> This is true, but as I shall argue in this section, it must be recognized that the film, by its negative design, cannot be bounded by generic constraints or even, finally, narrative ones. Some of its most striking features, such as framing, are quite unrelated to genre—or narrative—while others are recognizably oppositional.

<sup>22</sup> Watanabe Takenobu, *Nikkatsu akushon no kareina sekai*, vol. 2 1963-1967 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1981-2), pp. 133-7.

<sup>23</sup> Watanabe, pp. 134-5.

<sup>24</sup> Watanabe, pp. 133, 135.

Nearly every *yakuza* and crime thriller of the 1960s, including Suzuki's own, progresses in a linear fashion that suggests fate towards a climactic duel or battle. On a diegetic, superficial, level, *Koroshi no rakuin* corresponds to this structure, and yet confounds it with a profound circularity. The story begins with former No. 7 killer losing his confidence because of a woman, taking to drink, and finally sacrificing his life to kill a high-ranking assassin. The story ends with the former No. 3 Killer losing his confidence because of a woman, taking to drink, and sacrificing his life to kill a higher-ranking assassin. The Organisation's dystopic operation will thus go on repeating itself.

And yet, a circular structure is not enough for Suzuki; *Koroshi no rakuin* is also a triptych. The film falls perfectly into three thirty minute segments, and like a creature that swallows its own tail, the final segment functions as the satirical negation of what has come before. The first segment is in every way a setting up of the milieu and the character. Hanada does his job, sleeps with his new wife, and meets Misako. In the second segment, 'everything goes crazy' (*Subete ga kurutteru*, 1960): Hanada is pursued by the Organisation, shot by his wife, and falls for Misako. It is important to note where the second segment ends. Following the murder of Mami, Hanada picks up the professional pieces and faces off against the Organisation. This shootout at the Tokyo docklands, though unique as an action set piece, is nevertheless structurally predictable. It stands for the climax of so many studio action films, which typically come to an end at this point, but for a short coda. Hanada has wiped out the rival gang and has 'wrapped up' his love problems unhappily. This is precisely the point at which Shishido's more conventional vehicle, *Koruto wa ore no pasupōto* (1967), ends.

But at *precisely* this moment, Number One reappears on the scene and initiates the third segment of the film. This segment is superfluous in narrative and structural

terms. If the two had had a duel on the spot (a possibility which Suzuki dangles before us four times), the narrative would have been resolved. Rejecting the pleasures of closure, however, Suzuki carries on the film for thirty minutes in the form of the interminable cat-and-mouse game between Hanada and Number One. Although this portion of the film carries the satirical ‘sting,’ narratively it is a mere repetition of the second segment. Again Hanada starts off with confidence and descends into paranoia and alcohol; again Hanada is tested by his love for Misako; again, Hanada picks up the pieces and fights back, resulting in a second and final climax. The only difference between the two segments is, of course, that Hanada appears to die in the film’s final moments. And this is a crucial difference. Suzuki repeats the second segment in order to negate it, just as he kills off Hanada to reveal the ‘truth’ of the duel: nobody beats the system and survives. This is not the truth of Tōei’s *ninkyō* hero, who masochistically accepts the system by accepting imprisonment;<sup>25</sup> it is simple annihilation.

As *Koroshi no rakuin* rehashes its own and every other 1960s crime narrative, it negates them in the form of comedy. The expressionist violence of the second segment gives way to the utter absurdity of the third. As Marx would have it, history is played first as tragedy and then as farce. This is the best possible summation of *Koroshi no rakuin*. Compare, for example, the treatment of Misako in the second and third parts. In the second, Hanada has a nightmarish sexual encounter with Misako, suffused with the threat of death, in her apartment full of desiccated butterflies. In contrast, the third segment portrays a washed up, drunken Hanada pining for the lost Misako. An overhead shot finds him an abject, pathetic figure, kneeling face down on the floor before a small pile of butterflies, tossing them up in the air and letting them

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<sup>25</sup> Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema* (London: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 160-2, 165.



fall on his head as he whimpers ‘Misako! Misako!’ It is perhaps the most ridiculous moment of a sublimely absurd film.



8:17 Negativity as Farce: the breakdown of Hanada's masculine ideal as comic-pathetic spectacle

I have previously discussed the centrality of the male homosocial union to the crime thriller. In the third segment, Suzuki devolves the theme into farce. As Hanada and Number One establish a tedious routine of eating, sleeping, and going to the bathroom together, Number One also suggests that, *ostensibly* for security, they must keep their arms linked at all times. When the two go out, arm and arm, to a restaurant, their adoption of the postures of marriage comically provokes the postman, the passersby, and potentially many of the viewers of the period.

*Negative Movements: Invisibility, Disappearance, Reversal, Interruption*

Thus far I have discussed the narrative and ideological structures of *Koroshi no rakuin*. Yet it falls upon us to identify other formal varieties of what I have called Suzuki's negative aesthetic. For it is principally through *mise-en-scène* and montage that Suzuki differentiates his film from the formal economy of Nikkatsu and other

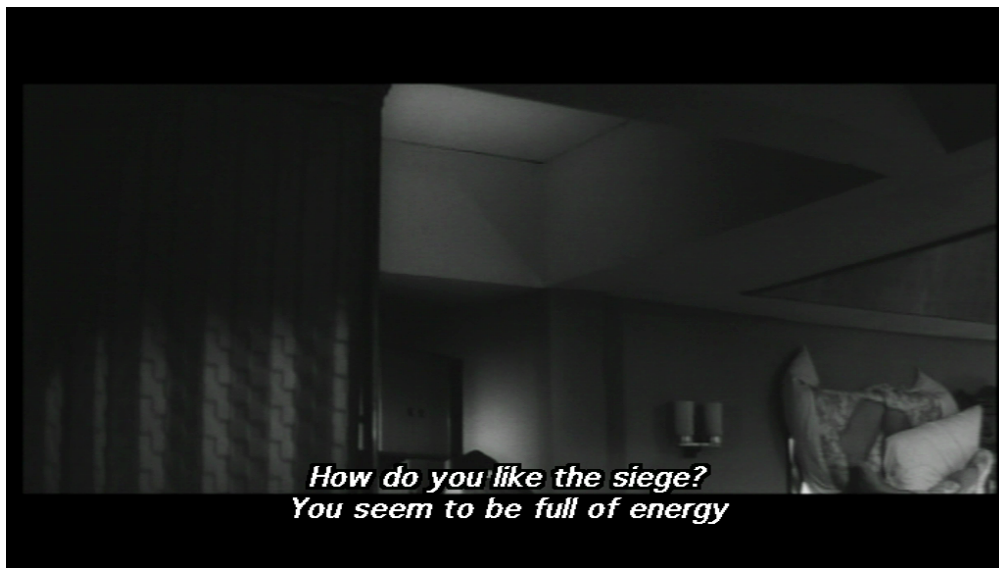
action films and indeed from the classical studio style as a whole. I shall demonstrate how these formal strategies accomplish several distinct kinds of ‘negative movement’ such as invisibility, disappearance, reversal, and interruption, the consequences of which are an irreversible negation of the classical form, the narrative and visual ‘comprehensiveness’ that Nikkatsu President Hori was motivated, by this film, to reinforce.

*Koroshi no rakuin* is remarkable for its time in insisting upon the lack of visibility of the characters and main actions in a scene. The theme of invisibility is appropriate as a narrative metaphor: Hanada cannot see what goes on behind the scenes (the Organisation), nor, indeed, can he use his eyes to separate reality and fantasy (Misako). Invisibility mounts to a paradoxical presence in the ‘sniper duel’ sequence between Hanada and Number One. A large portion of the montage (discussed below) emphasises the ‘phantom presence’ and the disembodied/mediated voice of Number One, who represents another negative power that is particularly germane to cinematic montage: *disappearance*.<sup>26</sup> Hanada cannot see or determine the enemy’s position, yet is himself under surveillance at every moment; wherever he goes, Number One can (impossibly) see him, an excessive visibility that invokes the panoptic.

Especially in this sniper sequence, large objects such as walls and partitions block the camera’s view of the characters.

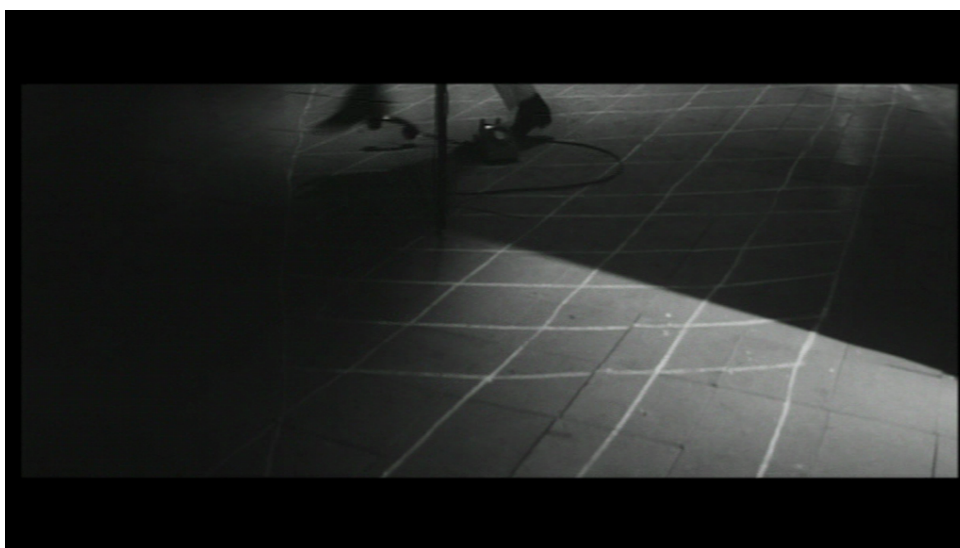
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<sup>26</sup> Number One’s ability to disappear and reappear, as if by magic, recalls the first crime films of the Japanese cinema. These were remakes of the successful French film *Zigomar* (1911), about a similarly disappearing/reappearing criminal. Like *Koroshi no rakuin*, the *Zigomar* films incited a (much larger) scandal over cinema’s supposed violation of public mores. Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c2010), pp. 50-65.



8:18 Blocked Up: the frame bisected by a moveable partition while the head of the frustrated protagonist is barely glimpsed at bottom left of centre

If this is only mildly distracting, the constant reframing of character action and movement calls blatant attention to itself. Here, flash pans in all four directions steal the centre of the frame away from the protagonist. At other moments, the camera pans away from Hanada, anticipating his future movement in the same direction; when Hanada arrives back in the frame, however, the result is askew: it might contain only his head at the bottom of screen, or his feet at the top.



8:19 Deframing: a composition with Hanada's feet flashing across the bottom of the frame

These framings represent a new variant of the active, reflexive camera which had appeared in the earlier sex scene in Hanada's apartment, asserting its own mobile POV as it prowled through empty spaces. In both sequences, there are an unusual number of shots that emphasise, either by fixed framing or extensive panning, *the lack of action* going on in a given space, or the disappearance of a character from his or her expected position.



8:20 Empty Space and the Moving Camera: four extended, elaborate tracking shots, which locate neither actions nor characters, challenge a normative concept of style in cinematic narrative

With these provocative strategies of denied visibility, the camera becomes a more insistent presence than the Japanese cinema had yet experienced. David Melville writes that 'Suzuki has rebelled constantly against the "compulsion to create worlds that do not acknowledge that they are being watched."' <sup>27</sup> What the denial of visibility accomplishes, paradoxically, is the implied 'visibility' of the camera itself. This virtual appearance of what cannot appear (the camera) is another profound and unmistakable negation of the classical style. The camera declares an unorthodox agency in the shaping of events: is it interfering in or creating the narrative? The

<sup>27</sup> Melville, quoting Mark Cousins, in 'Confessions of a Stray Cat: *Pistol Opera*,' *Senses of Cinema* 50 (2009). <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/cteq/pistol-opera>. Accessed 6/9/2010.

notion of a closed diegesis dissolves into *mise-en-abyme*. This self-reflexivity extends beyond the camera to other formal strategies such as new and intensive use of non-diegetic graphics. At the film's exact midpoint, Hanada is obsessed with his inability to kill Misako. Several rows of illustrated feminine symbols—butterflies, birds, and rain—invade Hanada's close-up, occupying in succession the top, bottom, and sides of the frame. Hanada reacts in dismay: but what, in terms of diegesis, can he be said to reacting to?



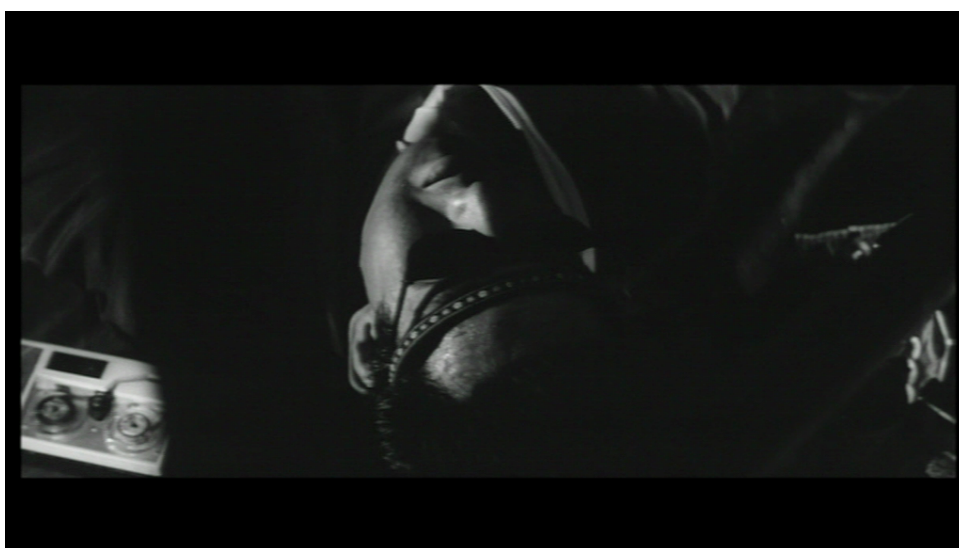
8:21 Non-diegetic Style and Satire in the '60s: Hanada dismayed by cartoon illustrations of femininity

The chiaroscuro patterning of Nagatsuka's low-key lighting creates a constant play between visible and invisible areas of the frame. Even when natural light is abundant, as in the daytime sequences in Misako's apartment, Nagatsuka uses a direct and undiffused spotlight as the key light source in several shots. Often this encourages the eye to wander over to a shining point of light on an object or area of the frame that is not relevant to the action; again, problematic visibility.



8:22 Excess Visuality: spot lighting on an area of the room with no narrative function

In several of the low-key night sequences, it is the protagonist himself who disappears from view. The final scene in the gymnasium is lit entirely by weak spotlights which also make it impossible to determine Hanada's position from shot to shot. Eventually, Hanada steps into the spot-lit boxing ring and makes himself a target. Betting on the visibility that his sunglasses will afford him when the lights go out, he uses the tactic of becoming visible in order to spot the location of 'invisible' Number One.



8:23 The Allegory of Excess Visibility: the sunglass-wearing Hanada capitalizes on his own visibility and a trick of the light



As this final example shows, the motif of withheld visibility also invokes and relates to other varieties of negative movement, notably that of reversal. In the sniper sequence, the position of Hanada and Number One had become increasingly reversible, with the camera adopting both POVs. This in turn led to the aforementioned reversal of love and death between the assassins as they began to adopt the habits of a married couple. In the end, Hanada turns the tables on Number One, but only at the price of his own sudden death, the final reversal.

In the nightmare sequence in Misako's apartment, however, the movement of reversal evolves into another negative trope, that of *interruption*. Both characters try to express physical love for one another, but on each occasion, one attempts to kill the other instead. This in turn leads to several infamous scenes of *coitus interruptus* between the rapine Hanada and the murderous *femme fatale*.



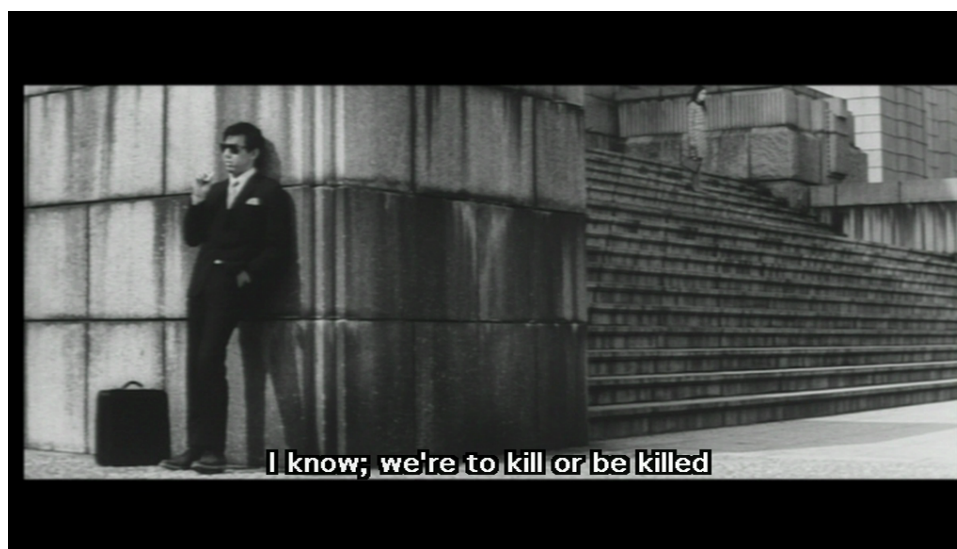
8:24: Uncanny Femininity: a 'dead' butterfly floats onto Misako's crotch and terrifies Hanada as he attempts to have intercourse with her

The tough hero cannot handle these overt and symbolic displays of uncanny female power, however, and starts to fall apart: thus the film accomplishes yet another major reversal, that of gender and power, passivity and activity.

### III. DISCONTINUITY AND THE *TIME IMAGE* OF DELEUZE

#### *Time and Technique in the Modern Cinema: Deleuze, Buñuel, Suzuki*

In *Koroshi no rakuin*, the breakdown of the flawed hero is accompanied by the chaotic, spatially indeterminate action that Suzuki had slowly developed since *Rajo to kenjū* (1957). More than ever, Suzuki emphasises not only visible discontinuities between adjacent shots, but incongruities of sound and image in a single shot. For instance, while Hanada and Misako are having a conversation on the film's soundtrack, they are situated at different points of a large public square.



8:25 Disjunction of Sound and Image: a conversation on the soundtrack from an 'impossible' spatial distance

This strategic use of what I call 'discontinuity editing' is the lynchpin of the Suzuki style. *Koroshi no rakuin* showcases Suzuki's editing practice in its most



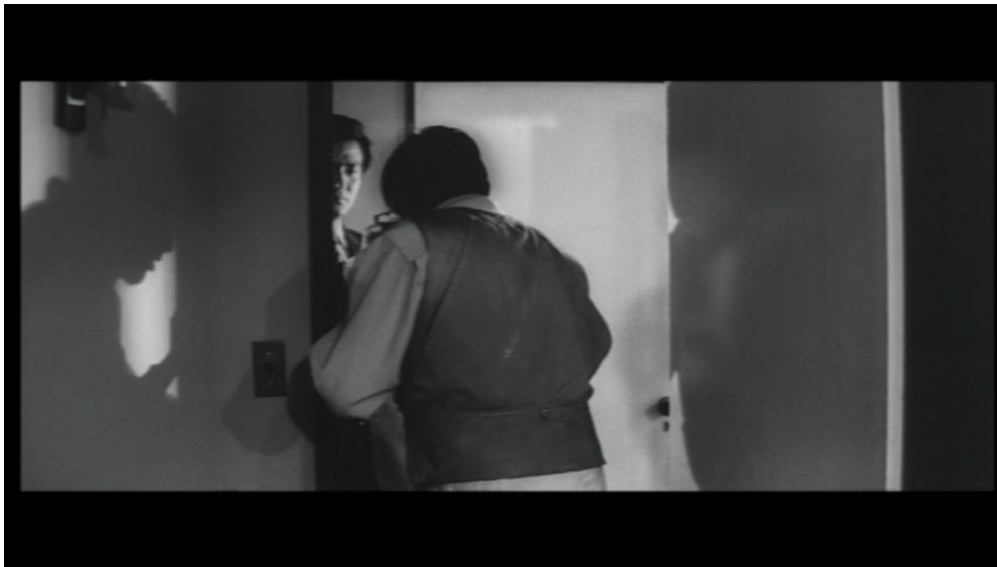
differential form; I argue, in fact, that it raises this ‘discontinuity aesthetic’ to a level of conceptual significance. In Chapter One, I introduced Deleuze’s concept of the post-war cinema’s ‘time image,’ or the direct cinematic representation of time. This entailed ‘false continuity and irrational cuts’ deployed to violate the system of classic continuity editing that imitates the human ‘sensory-motor schema’ and subordinates cinematic time as merely the measure of coherent, logical movement through space.<sup>28</sup> The possibilities of cinematic expression are multiplied as new configurations of ‘irrational’ cutting proliferate. Whereas editing in most narrative film serves the interest of spatial and temporal continuity, consider the blatant spatial and temporal ‘falsity’ of the following juxtaposition from *Koroshi no rakuin*. In the first shot, Hanada spots Number One outside his apartment window, on the top of a church tower in the distance:



8:26 Discontinuity Aesthetics, Shot (1): Number One on the Bell Tower

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), p. xi.

In the second shot, Hanada jumps up from the window, turns, and runs out of his apartment door. However, a second later, he returns to the apartment followed by Number One, whose gun is trained on the protagonist's head.



8:27 Discontinuity Aesthetics, Shot (2): Number One in the apartment

How could Number One have crossed the distance from the church tower to the apartment complex hallway in the four seconds of time that have passed from the end of Shot (1) to his appearance in Shot (2)? It is in some sense ‘impossible,’ and such impossible narrative events, achieved through editing, identify the mature Suzuki.

The example illustrates just one kind of cinematic sign among many that, according to Deleuze, partially reveal a ‘direct image of time.’ Pure optical and sound descriptions, as discussed in Chapter Three, are only the most basic signifiers of modern cinema. But the most important signs in connection to Suzuki are certainly those that operate directly through false continuity and irrational cuts. As I shall discuss in this section, Suzuki’s practice may be seen as incorporating a number of different types of Deleuzian signs related to this discontinuity, each of which constitute the modern cinema in a slightly different way. I shall also discuss how

Deleuze relates the practice of such signs to new qualities and powers of cinematic narrative, particularly that which he calls ‘powers of the false.’

We might begin by considering Deleuze’s category of *chronosigns*, which help us to relate the originality and import of Suzuki’s experiments with narrative time to those of various European ‘New Wave’ filmmakers of the 1960s. *Chronosigns* depict complex time relations in a particular way, through the invocation of multiple, simultaneous ‘presents’ in the cinema. Deleuze is somewhat vague as to how ‘simultaneous presents’ may be represented through cinematic technique, but fortunately gives concrete examples from the later films of Buñuel. The surrealist is considered by Deleuze to have evolved from a harsh naturalism towards a more complex arrangement of narrative time, that is, *chronosigns*,<sup>29</sup> which can be identified by ‘the subjection of the image to a power of “repetition-variation.”’<sup>30</sup>

However, Deleuze makes a crucial distinction in regards to the use of ‘repetition-variation’ in cinema. Sometimes Buñuel uses such repetition-variation to represent time as cyclical rather than linear.<sup>31</sup> As discussed in the previous section, *Koroshi no rakuin* is also perfectly circular. But in Deleuze’s rigorous taxonomy, cyclical time is not enough to accomplish the break with classical cinematic continuity. Repetition in the late films of Buñuel, according to Deleuze, presents not cycles of time, but paradoxes of simultaneity. For example, in *Phantom of Liberty* (1974), a little girl is reported as being lost by her parents even though she is right beside them the whole time: ‘she has never stopped being there and will be found again.’ In *Belle de Jour* (1966) ‘the husband’s final paralysis does and does not take place’<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, in Suzuki’s *Zigeunerweisen* (1981) the extramarital affair does

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, pp. 102-3

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>32</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 103.

and does not take place, but such paradoxes also pertain to Suzuki's films of the 1960s. The newlywed sex scene in *Koroshi no rakuin* presents one of the more stunning cases of a complex present tense in the cinema of that decade. One cannot determine whether the various sex acts are represented in chronological order. Did they occur in close succession, or were they repeated over a long period of time? It is impossible to know how much time, hours or days, have passed. Not only this, but moments of the before(s) and after(s) of intercourse are intercut with the sexual acts themselves, including moments of crucial plot information. The scene also contains close-ups of Misako, with whom Hanada has become sexually obsessed. Misako is clearly not in the house at the time(s) of the sex scene, but Hanada has met her before, and he will meet her again in the house at the end of the sequence. Are these shots, then, memories, fantasies, or moments of the future? Without the ability to discriminate, these must clearly be seen as paradoxes of simultaneity. 'It is the simultaneity of points of present, these points breaking with all external succession, and carrying out quantic jumps between presents which are doubled by the past, the future, and the present itself.'<sup>33</sup> Through discontinuity, each shot becomes a 'present' in and of itself, rather than a point in an orderly succession of events. We have little choice but to consider the various sex acts on screen as each equally and irreducibly 'present'; linear succession of shots ceases to signify the linear succession of narrative time. This in turn discourages the viewer's faith that there *is* a linear order of diegetic events, independent of its formal description, to be represented. In Deleuzean terms, the scene represents an aesthetic of 'pure description': it cannot or will not represent anything *beyond* description (i.e., a linear, diegetic thread independent of description).

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<sup>33</sup> Deleuze, p. 274.

Suzuki's technique generally aims to reveal not the solidity of existence in time and space, but the gaps and discontinuities inherent in the human experience of both, clouded by limitation, incomprehension, and unknowing. But such discontinuity is not only significant in regards to fragmentation as a revelation of complex time-relations (*chronosigns* in the Deleuzean system); it has other, far-reaching consequences for the notions of truth and falsehood, judgement and relativism, in the cinema.

*From Discontinuity to Nihilism... Welles and Suzuki*

Let us be clear that for Deleuze, the words 'truth' and 'falsity' as applied to the modern cinema practice relate not to questions of morality or even veridical truth but purely and simply to the logical sequencing of space and time (the imitation of the human sensory-motor schema). However the consequences or 'powers' that emerge from 'false' continuity are another matter: they allowed certain directors of the 1960s to represent the world as constituted by ontologies and moralities that were alternative to what the classical cinema had proposed. This is what Deleuze calls 'the powers of the false,' a consequence of the fragmentation discussed above.

The 'powers of the false' are not so much an evolution of *chronosigns* as a different aspect of them. The signs associated with 'the power of the false' still largely depend on the 'false continuity and irrational cuts' of *Koroshi no rakuin* but they also speak broadly to the deliberate artificiality of many 1960s films by Suzuki and others, their sense of radical removal from any extra-cinematic constitution of 'reality.' For Deleuze, the relation between discontinuity and larger questions of truth and falsehood in cinema narration can be understood thusly: in the classical cinema, 'the setting described is presented as independent of the description which the camera

gives of it and stands for a supposedly pre-existing reality.’ However, the modern cinema of false continuity is very different:

‘What we call a crystalline description stands for its subject, replaces it...both creates and erases it...It is now the description itself which constitutes the sole decomposed and multiplied object....Those pure descriptions...develop a creative and destructive function. In fact, [such] descriptions, which constitute their own object, refer to purely optical and sonic situations detached from their motor extension.’<sup>34</sup>

Narration in the classical cinema ‘claims to be true’ by virtue of its grounding in ‘legal connections in space and chronological relations in time,’ i.e. the realist sensory-motor schema.<sup>35</sup> Through irrational cuts and other techniques, the modern cinema ‘frees itself from the claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying’.<sup>36</sup> Space in the modern cinema is transformed: the new spaces ‘cannot be simply explained in a spatial way. They imply non-localizable relations. These are direct presentations of time...a...non-chronological time which produces movements necessarily ‘abnormal,’ essentially ‘false’<sup>37</sup>. Montage in this modern cinema has the function of ‘decomposing time relations’ rather than composing them, in order that ‘*all possible movements emerge from it.*’<sup>38</sup> Suzuki was in the vanguard of this transformation.

One of the conceptual consequences of this transition from ‘truth’ to infinite varieties of ‘falsehood’ has to do with character and identity. Because of the descriptive worlds to which they belong, characters in the modern cinema are no longer marked by fixed qualities: the character has an infinite capacity for change, variation, constant metamorphosis. With reference to the work of Nietzsche and the films of Welles, Deleuze calls this quintessential modern protagonist ‘a forger’ because he is always lying, either to himself or to others. Hanada, for example, goes

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, pp. 129, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Deleuze, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, p. 130. Emphasis mine.

from strong-willed to weak-willed and back again in his deluded quest to be ‘Number One.’ Because lacking in essence, the ‘forger’ becomes ‘a product of pure descriptions.’ In other words, cinematic description is all that exists of the character. This suited Suzuki admirably, for as Hasumi noted of Nogawa Yumiko, ‘Suzuki’s favourite actors use a physical approach, not a psychological one.’<sup>39</sup>

The character as pure description can also be seen as an outgrowth of the *consciousness* and *multiplication of cliché* which Deleuze considered as the first sign of the break-up of the classical cinema and its rhetoric of reality.<sup>40</sup> Under this new regime of character, Suzuki in *Tokyo nagaremono* deployed a self-reflexive iconography to caricature the hero/fighter of Nikkatsu’s popular cinema, who was already a sort of homogenization, for mass audiences, of two sources: the sexually attractive ‘good bad teen’ of Nikkatsu’s *taiyōzoku* (Sun-Tribe) films and the ‘chivalrous’ gangsters and samurai of Tōei studios. With Hanada, Suzuki also placed in his sights the ‘reassuringly’ professional criminal who had appeared in his own hard-boiled films.

Another consequence of the ‘powers of the false’ is that cinema no longer sets up ‘a structure of judgment,’ that is, a moral and ideological standpoint, embedded in the narrative, from which the characters are judged (‘crime never pays’, etc.). *Koroshi no rakuin* does not interpolate its viewers into the patriarchal structures of judgment which drive Hanada to madness; the viewer is kept at a critical distance *precisely* through the use of discontinuity and other non-diegetic gestures. Whereas even in the alienated, but realist, *mise-en-scène* of hard-boiled films like *Koruto wa ore no pasupōto*, the viewer maintains a certain empathetic and ideological closeness to the

<sup>39</sup> Hasumi, ‘A World Without Seasons’ in Suzuki and Hasumi, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem/Suzuki Seijun: The Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 214.

protagonist, it is impossible to maintain such a constant proximity to an inconsistent character who might be suddenly confronted by rows of cartoon butterflies. At such moments, the questioning attitude and interpretive distance of the viewer is forcible and inevitable.

For Deleuze, the absence of judgment results in a cinema of nihilism exemplified by Welles, and one which is an attractive analogue to the films of Suzuki. ‘The true world does not exist, and if it did...if it could be described...it would be useless, superfluous’<sup>41</sup>. As Deleuze’s ‘pure description’ replaces the camera’s supposedly ‘indexical’ view of the world, the viewer is urged to question whether a ‘real’ world beyond our symbolic description is a necessary or desirable postulate at all. Again, this has consequences for character. In this Nietzschean paradigm, a ‘truthful’ man is idealist, judgmental, constructionist: precisely what Suzuki has denounced. Tetsu in *Tokyo nagaremono* is just such an earnest man, and therefore a disaster for all those around him. In place of such men who stand for law and ‘higher values’ over life itself, Welles gives us protagonists who cannot be judged by conventional standards. Judgment itself is revealed as ‘an infinite sham’ in *Le Procès/The Trial* (1962) (which also relies heavily on discontinuity editing).<sup>42</sup> Without a moral anchor, either human or divine, the only thing that remains in Welles’ view of the world are ‘bodies which are forces, nothing but forces.’ The world is therefore without a centre, and the film style represents that de-centering as such. For Deleuze, Welles opposes exhausted and spent forces, which desperately appeal to the will-to-dominate, to changeable, variable forces which are constantly reinventing themselves, thus symbolizing ‘the goodness of life itself’.<sup>43</sup> This latter kind of force is

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze, p. 138.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze, p. 142. This is very obviously a relevant reading of Suzuki’s earlier *yakuza* film *Oretachi no chi ga yurusanai/Our Blood Will Not Forgive* (1964) which contrasts two brothers, a reckless, querulous, joyful ne’er-do-



also linked to artistic will. Nevertheless all these forces/personae are ‘forgers,’ liars, falsifiers, and a common link between them, according to Deleuze, is the natural necessity of betrayal. Betrayal is also the engine that powers the Suzuki narrative: by the boss in *Tokyo nagaremono*, by Mami, by the Organisation, by the world itself in *Koroshi no rakuin*. Perhaps Suzuki, in *Koroshi no rakuin* especially, is subjecting the *yakuza* (and Japanese society) to a reductive, materialist, negative analysis in the manner that Deleuze ascribes to Welles. Beyond the ideological fanaticism which is often so fragile, beyond the search for money, lies the simple and exhausted desire to perpetuate power. But in showcasing weak anti-heroes who are ultimately incapable of change, Suzuki’s nihilist narratives relate the conflict of *two* exhausted powers (bad hero and bad gangsters), without a ‘life-affirming’ power in sight except for Suzuki himself, the artist who thrives on negative energy.

### CONCLUSION: A NEGATIVE ETHICS

If Suzuki’s films dwell on the human experience of time, they are also interested in ethical problems. Like the films of Ozu and Kurosawa, they address the ancient question of ‘how to live.’ But due to its negative character, the substance and form of Suzuki’s wisdom is unlike that which we find in the earlier Japanese masters. What *Koroshi no rakuin* teaches us is the reality principle, that which continually eludes the ill-fated Hanada. The film embraces the real through negation, that is, by insisting on the artificiality of cinematic narrative.<sup>44</sup> It exalts the primacy of arbitrary

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well (Takahashi Hideki) and a stoic, successful, secretive, and miserable *yakuza* (Kobayashi Akira). It is inevitable that the latter must sacrifice himself for the former: the act, like the film itself, implies no judgment on the younger’s brother’s irresponsibility.

<sup>44</sup> In an interview for *Eiga geijutsu* no. 255 (November 1968), p. 52, Suzuki told his former Assistant Director, Yoshitada Sone, that ‘my method is to construct 99 percent falsity. When I’ve done that, I can have a glimpse of an instant of truth.’

form, mannerist rhetoric, and metaphorical gesture in the genre film over direct socio-political representation, the emphasis of the early *nuberu bagu*.

Classical cinema sought to verify and ‘naturalize’ the truth of abstract ideals and propositions; but, as Deleuze understood, modern cinema abandons these criteria of judgement in favour of relativism and negation. For Suzuki, beliefs and ideals are death-traps, laid by civilization itself, to snare the excessively socialized ego. Following surrealism, Suzuki exalts the ‘innocent’ dreams of the unconscious, full of desire and violence, over the constructed aspirations of civilization. Professionalism is just one of the social illusions that Suzuki stretches on the rack; the principal target of attack may be the ‘ideal’ itself, the phantasmic construct of thought that Japanese cultural and social organisation had imposed on subjective experience, with little regard for empirical realities. The Pacific War is never a stone’s throw away from Suzuki’s authorial consciousness. In this film, the ranks of the assassins are like the rigid hierarchies of the military which strive to construct something orderly, something ‘positive’ out of the chaos and insanity of annihilation.

Hanada is incapable of change, a spent force, magnificent in his decline, but literally exhausting himself to death before our very eyes. The spark that sets Hanada’s downfall in motion is the butterfly that lands on his gunsights, causing him to miss a target. This may be the hand of fate, or a Buñuelian ‘bio-psychic impulse’ relating to his fatal attraction to Misako.<sup>45</sup> But the fact remains that it is Hanada’s only strength, the killing prowess honed by years of egoistic competition, that keeps him on the path to self-destruction. Nature (the butterfly) is merely that which reveals the lie.

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<sup>45</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, pp. 127-9.

What if, unlike Hanada, we wish to survive, to be a proteus rather than a narcissus? Can we interpret *Koroshi no rakuin* as holding out a hope that material realities may ground us just enough so as not to be carried away by ideology? Perhaps not, for materiality as a form of reality-testing is elusive and totally negative. The reality of sex, which in many of the early *nuberu bagu* films was sufficient to confound institutional power and its organisation of our subjectivity, is shown here as infinitely corruptible by social constructs of gender. Like Mami Hanada, the modernist *auteurs* of the *nuberu bagu* overestimate the ‘reality’ of the senses and underestimate the power of ideology; critics certainly advanced such an interpretation of Imamura’s rural ‘originary’ societies and Yoshida’s female protagonists<sup>46</sup>. If Hanada represents the Quixotic failure of civilization, Mami represents the failure of biology.

How can we improve on Mami’s belief that we must embrace our own beasthood in all its sex, violence, and death, without turning these into models of social aspiration, the building blocks of organized power? How can we live the Dionysian life of anarchy without slipping into brutish tyranny, the domination of the few?

Suzuki puts the question in these terms. If he has an answer, it is a negative one, and it is surely located in the radical individuality of Misako, who is the character most associated with surrealism. In a slightly complicated move, surrealist imagery in *Koroshi no rakuin* is also used to express the paranoid nightmare of patriarchy. But the nightmare shakes our grip on the so-called reality. Patriarchal ideology is shown up for what it often is: an erotic fantasy of domination which society has mistaken for the natural order of things. The surrealism of Buñuel—which

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<sup>46</sup> Kurita Isamu, in an *Eiga geijutsu* (Feb. 1966) article on Yoshida, wrote that ‘the sexual act is the only one that exists as a moment’; translated in Standish, *Politics, Porn, and Protest* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 56. See also Ogawa Tōru in *Eiga geijutsu* (Sept. 1964) on Imamura, translated in Standish, pp. 79-88.

in its riposte to Christianity and bourgeois hypocrisy had sometimes devolved into the Sadean wish-fulfilment of an 'entitled' patriarchy (*L'âge d'Or*)—is reconstituted by Suzuki as a liberating force.

Misako, however, is continually hovering on the verge of self-willed death. Therefore, we cannot interpret *Koroshi no rakuin* as recommending survival at all costs. It is decidedly not life-affirming. If there is a positive wisdom to the film, it is meant to save us from delusion, not from annihilation, which is inevitable. Sooner or later, whether through war, crime, or capitalism, society will turn on the individual. There is no escape. But whereas the violence and self-destruction of Hanada, like the martial tradition he represents, is thoroughly ideological, the violence of Misako comes from a place of radical subjectivity, an indecipherable nexus of the anti-social (rebellion against imposed gender constructs), the biological (sexual sterility, which may be either the result or cause of her social rebellion), and something more besides, having to do with her erotic appropriation of the inevitable, i.e. death. Yet this only leaves us with the dilemma of the similarly suicidal Hamlet: to be or not to be?

Misako's negativity, like Hamlet's, somehow carries exactly what Hanada lacks: the capacity for change. Unlike wartime philosophy, a truly negative morality rejects such notions as dying for a cause. If *Koroshi no rakuin* teaches anything, then, it is perhaps that we should use our death wisely. Either route—reality or ideological fantasy—terminates in death, but it is more empowering to escape delusion. This frees up the time that is given to us *before* death, for instance, to lose ourselves in passion. As the director has said, '...It is better to be asleep. That way you can do what you want. That blissful Japan really lives.'<sup>47</sup> Passion can take the form of dream, eroticism, surrealist artistic expression. The wisdom of *Koroshi no rakuin* treads a fine line, and is easily

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<sup>47</sup> translated by Gregory Barrett in Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, p. 228.

corruptible. Is it possible to escape ideology and the mark that the socializing process leaves upon our desires? Never entirely. There is no escape, but our ability to tolerate our situation is located in dreams and in a process of endless negation and self-negation, a strategy of resistance for the soul.

## CONCLUSION: ‘NO NEED FOR CAUSALITY’ (THE TAISHŌ TRILOGY, 1980-1991)

### INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN TO THE PAST

During his period of ‘cinematic exile’ from 1968-1977, Suzuki used to meet regularly with former ‘Guryū Hachirō screenwriter Tanaka Yōzō. They would often play a game of Go while discussing how to make ‘a new kind of film.’<sup>1</sup> The discussions resulted in the collaboration of an ex-Nikkatsu creative team to produce two films in succession, *Zigeunerweisen* and *Kagerō-za/Mirage Theatre* (1980-1).<sup>2</sup> Suzuki and his producer conceived of *Yumeji* almost ten years later and at that time declared the films a ‘Taishō Trilogy’.

After the critical and commercial failure of *Hishū monogatari*, Suzuki was less acceptable to what remained of Japan’s commercial film industry than ever before. The Taishō films were produced independently thanks to the intervention of a third key figure: Arato Genjirō. Arato was an actor/manager who had been active in the heyday of *andogura* (underground) theatre in the late 1960s. He was connected to associates of Suzuki such as Tanaka, Yamatoya Atsushi, and director Fujita Toshiya (star of *Zigeunerweisen*),<sup>3</sup> who had made for themselves a dual cultural identity as producers of Nikkatsu *roman poruno* and self-appointed representatives of the political avant-garde within the film industry. The entrepreneurial Arato acquired money to finance a very low-budget film; without him, the second half of Suzuki’s 50-year cinema project would not have been possible. Unable to find any corporate or

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<sup>1</sup> Interview included on the 2006 Kino DVD of *Zigeunerweisen* (ASIN: B000E1MY6S).

<sup>2</sup> Isoda Tsutomu and Todoroki Yukio, *Sei/jun/ei/ga* (Tokyo: Waizu Shuppan, 2006), pp. 350-1.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts differ of how Arato and Suzuki initiated their collaboration, but certainly a major catalyst was Arato’s appearance as an actor in an avant-garde ‘*roman poruno*’ film planned by Tanaka and written by Yamatoya; Isoda and Todoroki, *Sei/jun/ei/ga*, p. 350.

independent cinema willing to screen the completed film of *Zigeunerweisen*, Arato resurrected a strategy of the influential ‘Red Tent’ theatre troupe—the first to bypass commercial exhibition by staging productions in a tent—when he created an inflatable dome near Ueno Park.<sup>4</sup> This functioned as the sole venue for the film’s exhibition until ground-level enthusiasm led to an expanded release and to shocking financial and critical success. In many ways, the dream of the cinematic independents of the Japanese *nuberu bagu* had been realized by Suzuki Seijun, their most marginal of associates.

As I have argued in this thesis, over the course of his first forty-three feature films, Suzuki’s authorship was defined as the development of an oppositional and differential image practice from within the studio system—and yet reliant on the tools of that system, and on its populist address. But in the 1980s, Suzuki was given the opportunity to reassert and justify his once-discredited signature of the 1960s—and yet compelled to readjust that signature to suit a very different era and a different mode of production, namely, the independent art film in Japan. It is no longer possible to formulate Suzuki’s authorship, in this independent mode, as primarily a set of unconventional and excess stylistics and redundant codes atop a formulaic studio narrative—rather, we are confronted, for the first time, with Suzuki’s conception of the totality of (independent) film production. In this concluding chapter, however, our analysis of the textual specificities of Suzuki’s later independent work will demonstrate that, when viewed in relation to the aesthetic strategies of the Nikkatsu years, the career of the Late Suzuki may be seen as a pronounced reassertion of many of those strategies. Of all Suzuki’s late work, the Taishō films are best suited to serve

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<sup>4</sup> Famed avant-garde director Kara Jūrō’s improvisational *Jokyō gekijō*, or ‘Situation Theatre,’ became known as the ‘Red Tent’ theatre in 1967 due to this non-commercial exhibition strategy, which helped it to become an icon of counter-culture and artistic activism: Benito Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre: from Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism*, Rev. ed. (Princeton University Press 1995), p. 260. Arato had been a member of, and then fired from, the ‘Red Tent’ group before he created his own troupe, the *Tenshogikan*, in 1972.

as a conclusion to this study, for they self-consciously represent, as we shall see, a summation and a stock-taking, a definitive return to the past, a multi-valent past that can be viewed metonymically as personal, aesthetic, cultural, and national.

Despite the fact that the Late Suzuki fits comfortably, almost exemplarily, into the familiar and recognised guise of the global art cinema *auteur* who had come into being in the 1950s as a result of transnational art cinema exhibition, nevertheless I would argue that the conceptual and allegorical continuities between the Nikkatsu and Taishō films are so trenchant that each has come to partially define the other. Suzuki's independent career utilised his newly privileged cultural position, what Pierre Bourdieu would call the position of the 'consecrated' artist (or *auteur*),<sup>5</sup> to defend a concept of cinema that he had long struggled to express. Both halves of his career, even despite the later absence of studio opposition, amount to a 'minor' cinema, a self-defined counter-cinema that means to differentiate itself—by opportunistic adjustment to internal norms and cultural change—from what exemplifies the institutional. In the role of art cinema practitioner, however, Suzuki was encouraged to demand, more intensely, the viewer's questioning of the possibility of representation and the relation of style to narration.

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<sup>5</sup> In using and distinguishing between such terms as 'independent *auteur*', 'avant-garde filmmaker' and their supposed opposite the 'studio director', I am content to apply Bourdieu's sociological objectification of cultural production to the field of cinema, and to accept that the categories of film and film authorship expressed by these terms may sometimes have less to do with consistent stylistic norms and features across particular groupings of films, and more to do with the way that art and art producers are positioned within an ongoing discursive struggle between economic capital and symbolic capital by which the middle and upper class consumers of culture establish standards of taste: Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 128-9, 133-135. In applying Bourdieu's theoretical schema of cultural production to Japanese cinema, Isolde Standish convincingly demonstrates that in this specific field of cultural production, the consecration of a film director as an 'independent' or 'avant-garde' *auteur* tended to be determined less by the actual economics of film production and distribution than by 'various interrelated and interested factions within the field...filmmakers, critics and journals, the audience by which the films and journals are appropriated, and increasingly...academia': Standish, *Politics, Porn, And Protest* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 5. These forces consecrated Suzuki as a member of the avant-garde in the 1980s, but as we shall see, the director seems to have realized that, as Bourdieu states, 'avant-garde producers are determined by the past even in their innovations which aim to go beyond it...What happens in the field is more and more dependent on [its] specific history': Bourdieu, *The Field Of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004 [1985]), p. 188. For a brief history of the Japanese independent film scene, see Roland Domenig, 'The Anticipation of Freedom: Art Theatre Guild and Japanese Independent Cinema' (28 June 2004), <http://www.midnighteye.com/features/the-anticipation-of-freedom-art-theatre-guild-and-japanese-independent-cinema/>.



The ‘return’ to the past also represented, ironically, a new direction. *Koroshi no rakuin*, *Hishū monogatari* and, more ambiguously, *Tokyo nagaremono* had presented an aggressively contemporary mise-en-scène, an apocalyptic, or at the very least fallen, present day that, like the sublime Misako, was as exhilarating as it was dangerous. But in the 1980s, Suzuki’s return to the past seemed to catch another *zeitgeist*, a national mood of introspection and, to some extent, acceptance of history. But Suzuki’s sense of past, as we shall see, is revisionist and critical; it unambiguously rejects notions of cultural ‘wholeness’ and uniqueness in favour of a constant, inescapable, yet liberating structure of duality. I shall return to these differences—the recognition of duality and the departure from the ‘apocalyptic’ contemporary mode—at the end of the chapter.

In attempting to solidify a ‘new’ film aesthetic as a means, ironically, of a multi-faceted engagement with the past, Suzuki and Tanaka’s Taishō films drew partly on the themes and motifs of *Kantō mushuku*: dream and reality, the haunting of the past, the stubborn persistence of pre-war patriarchy and its traditional concept of masculinity. At the same time, they are adaptations of important literary works by the prominent Taishō-period writers Izumi Kyōka and Uchida Hyakken.<sup>6</sup> They engage not simply with the historical past of the Taishō era, but a more subjective, fragmented, and multiple sense of ‘pasts’ deriving from cultural and cinematic self-reflection. Many, not always congruent, aspects of Japanese cultural and artistic

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<sup>6</sup> Kyōka (1873-1939), fiction writer and playwright, was the principal literary figure of Japanese romanticism in the Meiji era. His 1906 short story *Shunchū*, and the sequel he wrote immediately afterwards, form the literary basis of *Kagerō-za*. They concern the suicide of a mysterious wife but also feature the protagonist encountering a supernatural theatre performance in the mountains of Kanazawa. Uchida Hyakken (1889-1971) was a short story writer, diarist, teacher of German at various universities and military academies during the Taishō era. Partially due to the Great Kantō Earthquake, Uchida’s Taishō stories of the uncanny were obscure until his reputation for *zuihitsu* (diaries and observational writings) burgeoned in the 1930s. *Zigeunerweisen* is based loosely on Uchida’s belated ‘gothic’ novella *Sarasate no ban*/The Sarasate Record (1952) and on an earlier story, ‘Yamakata bōshi’ or ‘The Bowler Hat’ (1934). See Rachel DiNitto, *Uchida Hyakken: A Critique of Modernity and Militarism in Pre-war Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2008).

inheritance are represented in these films, deriving from the Heian period, the Edo period, and the 1920s themselves.

Suzuki's Taishō films are not 'adaptations' so much as cultural interventions into this artistic paternity that Suzuki both courts and anxiously evades. On one level, Suzuki pictures the popular historical imaginary of Taishō as ordinary Japanese see it: consumerism, speed, Westernization, and eroticism;<sup>7</sup> on another level, he critiques this imaginary. Ironically, his vision of Japan's '*modan*' era is dominated, visually and otherwise, by the powerful spectre of pre-modern culture and belief.

Suzuki's choice of focus amounts to a revisionism of a certain broadly anti-realist strand of the hybrid art and literature of Taishō. This variegated strand was generally antagonistic to the naturalist *shōsetsu* ('I-novel'), with its narrowly phenomenological approach, and to the Socialist realism of the leftist intelligentsia. It applied successive waves of European artistic influence—German idealism, Victorian gothic, Expressionism, and, finally, Surrealism—to the purpose of revitalizing the Japanese traditional arts.<sup>8</sup>

In the remainder of this chapter I offer a number of different approaches by which we might analyse these formally complex and avant-garde films, but I shall not stray from the dual focus of (1) identifying the continuities and discontinuities between Suzuki's 'new cinema aesthetic' and the cinematic past and (2) characterizing Suzuki's ideological engagement with Japan's cultural past. First, I discuss Suzuki's allegorical use of the figure of the Ghost (so central to pre-modern

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<sup>7</sup> Contemporary observers such as the great novelist Kawabata Yasunari notably described the late 1920s and early 1930s as '*Eroticism, Nonsense, and Speed, and Humor* like social commentary cartoons, and *Jazz* songs and Women's legs', while the theorist Maruyama Masao emphasized in hindsight the new 'mass society' of leisure including 'the beginning of radio broadcasting ... bars ... cafes ... tearooms ... street buses and suburban railways ... department stores ...': translated in Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009), pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> There was a pronounced effort amongst the intellectual elite of Late Meiji and early Taishō to revitalize kabuki, in particular, which was felt to have declined in the early Meiji period due, amongst other things, to the ideological intervention of the state: Ortolani, p. 183.

culture) and the Double, arguing that the Ghost is a 'transitional' representative of the multiple past identities of the nation as well as the complex, subjective experience of time. Crucially, both the Ghost and the Double also allegorize Suzuki's own conception of cinema and its 'fundamental illusions'. In Section Two, I discuss Suzuki's negation of established practices of cinematic narration, foregrounding the unstable nature of represented reality and the multiplicity of interpretation. Thirdly, I discuss Suzuki's formal and ideological citation of theatre, with its dual focus on pre-modern tradition and the 1960s avant-garde: these films ambiguously search for an ideological position in relation to their artistic paternity. In the fourth section, I re-read these allegories in light of Deleuze's notion of the 'crystal sign,' a cinematic image that reveals a more complex experience of 'pastness' than had been allowed by the classical cinema.

## I. ALLEGORIES OF THE GHOST AND THE DOUBLE

### *Allegories of the Past: The Ghost*

Suzuki told Isoda and Todoroki that his conception of a ghost (*yūrei*) was that of a being who shifts from one world to another, always on the margins.<sup>9</sup> Insofar as this definition goes, it is in accord with long-held religious and folkloric 'strongly held beliefs in the reality of the dead',<sup>10</sup> predicated on the 'notion of co-existence of the world of the living (*kono-yo*) and the world of the dead (*ano-yo*).'<sup>11</sup> It is at this point, however, that *Zigeunerweisen* may be said to part company with the conventional Japanese ghost story. Suzuki recognizes that the narrative structure of the post-war ghost film, like its literary antecedents, was dependent on the traditional

<sup>9</sup> in Isoda and Todoroki, *Sei/jun/ei/ga*, p. 349.

<sup>10</sup> Richard N. Tucker in Colette Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2008), p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Colette Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*, p. x.

notion of ‘the grudge’ (*urami*) as the basis or kernel around which the narrative unfolds. As in Nanboku’s kabuki masterpiece *Yotsuya kaidan*/*Ghost Story of Yotsuya* (1825), by far the most popular Japanese ghost story of the last two centuries, a man mistreats or murders a wife or lover: he is then haunted by her hideous ghost. The ‘grudge’ imparts a structural and ideological causality to the Japanese ghost story. As in the Noh theatre, there is always a reason that the dead cannot bring themselves to leave the world of the living; they are nursing some grievance which ties them back to our material world.<sup>12</sup> However, Suzuki remarked that he had a pet theory about ghosts: there was ‘no need for the causality’;<sup>13</sup> ghosts haunt the living for no understandable reason, certainly not a grudge.

With this notion, Suzuki fundamentally reorients the Japanese ghost tale. I argue that Suzuki’s treatment of the ghost is largely allegorical,<sup>14</sup> and that the condition of being ‘stuck between two worlds’ (*ano-ya* and *kono-ya*) should not be understood supernaturally, but as a condition of being stuck between past and present. ‘Past and present’ in the context of the Taishō Trilogy not only refers to the ‘present’ of the Taishō moment, looking back on a pre-modern past; in Suzuki’s hands, the allegory extends to the self-reflexive, as cinema is already, and always, simultaneously ‘past’ and ‘present’ at the moment of viewing. Therefore, when Suzuki asserts ‘no need for causality’, we can take this as a cinematic manifesto. The Taishō films are a catalogue of the spatio-temporal discontinuity, dysfunctional ellipses, ruptured diegesis, and ‘impossible’ POVs. Conventional cinematic causality, achieved through continuity editing and linear narrative, is stretched to the breaking

<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Hand, ‘Aesthetics of Cruelty: Traditional Japanese Theatre and the Horror Film’, in Jay McRoy, ed., *Japanese Horror Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Suzuki in Isoda and Todoroki, p. 352.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in conversation with the critic Ogawa Tōru, Suzuki was uncomfortable with Ogawa’s use of the term ‘mysticism’ to describe *Zigeunerweisen*, which suggests that the director had more specific critical and aesthetic intentions. ‘Well, should I do the next one as naturalism?’ he challenged Ogawa: quoted in Fujita Masao’s review of *Zigeunerweisen*, *Kinema junpō* no. 786 (Late May, 1980), p. 152.

point. At moments, ‘another world’ of cinema thus appears on the screen, or haunts the familiar along its edges, threatening to break through.

The post-war ghost film and *kaiki eiga* (horror film) was defined in the 1950s, ideologically and industrially, by Daiei’s ‘ghost cat’ thrillers and by Nakagawa Nobuo’s innovative thrillers for Shintōhō, such as the box office success *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan/Yotsuya Ghost Story in Tokaido* (1959),<sup>15</sup> followed by *Jigoku/Inferno* (1960), a film which, rather like Suzuki’s films, captured the fascination of younger audiences and critics while ignored by the critical establishment at large.

The similarities between *Zigeunerweisen* and *Jigoku* are numerous. Both films feature a doppelgänger, in any case a popular motif of post-war horror. Both films feature one actress playing two different, but physically identical, women. And both feature a mysterious, demonic character who is clearly the alter-ego of the repressed male hero.<sup>16</sup> But when we examine the ideological function of such devices, a different picture emerges. In *Jigoku*, the doubling of the hero’s slain fiancée and his sister serves a clear purpose: apart from suggestions of incest, it also provides the guilty, suicidal hero with a reason to stay alive. In *Zigeunerweisen*, the double illustrates the mental instability of the protagonist and allegorizes not only the existence of multiple temporalities in our consciousness (fantasy and memory intertwined), but the paranoiac ‘doubleness’ of culture in the Taishō period, a notion which dominated intellectual discourses at the time.<sup>17</sup> The motif thus serves as historical allegory.

<sup>15</sup> This was only one of many post-war versions of the *Yotsuya kaidan* story, one of the first of which was made by Kinoshita in 1949 for Shōchiku. This was a modernized version which emphasized psychological guilt over the supernatural. Keiko I McDonald, *Japanese Classical Theatre in Films* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> This motif also occurs in Teshigahara’s *Tanin no kao/Face of Another* (Tōhō 1966).

<sup>17</sup> H.D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Pre-war Japan* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), p. xvii.

Nakagawa's horror films are centred, consciously or unconsciously, around that fear of female sexuality which Suzuki has so often uncovered. But sexuality in Nakagawa's films is configured, predictably, in the form of temptation readily yielded to. Apart from his depiction of Christianity in *Kenka erejii*, the notion of temptation is not integral to Suzuki's cinematic world. As I discuss below, sexuality in *Zigeunerweisen* is configured as uncanny in itself, estranged from the everyday, an aspect of that other world which, unlike Nakagawa's portrait of hell, is not necessarily worse than our own. Hence, the protagonist has fleeting fantasies, or unreliable memories, of sex with various women.

Furthermore, Nakagawa's narratives of displaced guilt partake of a structured absence: the concept of sexual immorality and its supposed consequences. The hell-bound protagonist of *Jigoku* is guilty of nothing except illicit, premarital sex. Nakagawa passes off the suffering of this character as a matter of fate or karmic retribution, an iron moral law. The Taishō Trilogy could not be more different in its sexual politics. Suzuki is concerned to achieve exactly what he praised Ōshima for doing in *Ai no korida/The Realm of the Senses* (1976): '...Ōshima has denied the existence of immorality....starting from [that] hypothesis, he has reduced it to a legal problem.'<sup>18</sup>

Having said that, the post-war ghost film—not only those of Nakagawa but also those of respected directors like Toyoda Shirō—does share with Suzuki an aesthetic that is heavily reliant on colour.<sup>19</sup> Nakagawa explicitly acknowledges the inspiration of pre-modern visual painting and theatre, with red light sources, red

<sup>18</sup> 'Cinema, Film Directors, and Oshima,' in Suzuki Seijun and Hasumi Shigehiko, *Suzuki Seijun: de woestijn onder de kersebloesem /Suzuki Seijun: The Desert Under the Cherry Blossoms* (Rotterdam: Film Festival Rotterdam, NFM/IAF, VPRO, Uitgeverij Uniepers Abcoude, 1991), p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> Toyoda's films include *Yotsuya kaidan* (Tōhō 1965) and *Jigokuhen/Portrait of Hell* (1969). The latter was an adaptation from the work of the Taishō writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, friend and literary colleague of Uchida Hyakken.

filters, and various kinds of graphic art representing hell, and pale blue used to represent ghosts and animated corpses.



9:1 The Colours of Hell: blue light filters signify the dead while red filters signify the denizens and torments of the Eight Hells (Nakagawa's *Jigoku*)

As we shall see, the ‘haunting’ scene in *Zigeunerweisen* calls up these traditional aesthetic associations, and yet differentiates itself.

At the beginning of the film Nakasago (Harada Yoshio) aggressively courts a geisha named Oine (Ōtani Naoko). But, a year later, the protagonist Aochi (Fujita) finds that Nakasago has married a woman named Sono who is Oine’s virtual double. Nakasago abandons Sono just after they have a child. Because of this, Aochi visits Sono at his friend’s house. In this scene the visual rhetoric of the ghost film comes fully into play, especially in regards to the use of light and colour.

The sequence begins with a long shot of Sono alone inside her house and looking into the camera, which is situated on the outside of the house. Sono is in the extreme background of this shot, yet also at the exact centre, framed by the house’s wooden doorway, the border between worlds. Sono makes an ‘inviting’ gesture and the lights go out.



9:2 At the Doorway: the lights dim themselves at Sono's gesture

The next shot is a reverse angle of Aochi stepping through the doorway inside the house, but now the lights are on again, a spatial-temporal confusion typical of Suzuki. Behind Aochi, the front door slides closed by itself, as if Suzuki is quoting a horror cliché. The next shot is a backlit silhouette of Aochi wandering down a dark corridor, with only a pale blue light illuminating the extreme background of the shot.



9:3 The Blue Light of Haunting: empty space made uncanny



This blue light is not used, as in Nakagawa or Toyoda, to illuminate a ghostly body like that of Sono. Instead it falls on our protagonist and on empty space: space itself is rendered uncanny. In this same shot, the lights in the hall briefly reappear and dim again, as does a strange red lantern that flares in and out. Seemingly unable to find Sono, Aochi wanders through near-darkened spaces for several shots, until the lights rise again on an empty room dominated by a screen painting of a peacock, a traditional symbol of masculine power that may indicate the ‘absent presence’ of Nakasago in the house. Again, the red lantern flashes in sync with the brief reappearance of the shot’s key light source, as if the key light is meant to be a diegetic light source (the lantern). However, the light that rises and falls in time with the lantern is *not* filtered red. Here is another example of Suzuki’s deployment of what Deleuze called the ‘powers of the false’.



9:4 Cinema in a False Light: a 'diegetic' red lantern flashes in the darkness, but it is non-diegetic white light that illuminates the space

Then, after two lateral tracking shots of Aochi moving through a dark hallway, he turns around in panic with his lighter, only to see the faces of three Kamakura beggars.



9:5 The Return of the Oppressed: Aochi glimpses the three beggars in the ghostly house

We learn later that these blind beggars may have killed each other, and this brings to the scene another allegorical element, the notion of the outcast, the social abject which the buttoned-up Aochi is evidently afraid of. In the next shot, the beggars have disappeared, but the wood-panelled wall of the hallway in front of the camera mysteriously collapses, revealing Aochi from the reverse angle of the previous shot.



9:6 Interior: Hell

The wall in front is now glowing red, with the suggestion of fire behind it, a clear indication of ‘hell’. Sono now stands in the place where the beggars stood previously. The film then cuts to the face of Sono appearing over Aochi’s shoulder as he murmurs, ‘I was once beguiled by a fox [*kitsune*] at night.’<sup>20</sup>



9:7 Beguiled by a Fox? Aochi struggles to define the uncanny Sono

<sup>20</sup> The fox is a major figure of Japanese mythology. In folklore and in extant medieval prose tales such as the *Konjaku monogatari*, beautiful women who seduce men often turn out to be foxes in disguise.

This sequence abruptly cuts away to another time and place: Sono cooking a hot-pot filled with uncanny masses of *konnyaku*, a traditional shellfish that, according to Rachel DiNitto, is ‘used repeatedly in the film to represent sexual tension.’<sup>21</sup>

The scene of ‘haunting’ in Nakasago’s house therefore contains a great deal of imagery that was conventional for ghost films of the 1950s: the symbolic use of red and blue light, a ghostly appearance in the mirror, a moment of dreamlike erotic promise, the invocation of the flames of hell. Even the use of the abject (the beggars) as a source of horror has a corollary in Nakagawa’s films. But Suzuki’s treatment of this genre material is highly revisionist: Suzuki’s reflexive conflation of diegetic and non-diegetic light sources owes far more to his own practice than to ghost films, which, as Keiko McDonald has suggested in reference to Nakagawa, usually strive to render the fantastic ‘convincingly’, i.e. with verisimilitude rather than with obvious artifice.<sup>22</sup> Suzuki’s play of light gives way to a play of space when Sono and Aochi, in a moment of sexual promise and confusion symbolised by the *konnyaku*, impossibly switch their positions in the room:



9:8 Representation Breaks Down (in the face of female nudity), Shot (1)

<sup>21</sup> Di Nitto, ‘Translating Pre-war Culture into Film: The Double Vision of Suzuki Seijun’s *Zigeunerweisen*,’ *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30 (Winter 2004), p. 54.

<sup>22</sup> Keiko I. McDonald, *Japanese Classical Theatre in Films*, p. 92.



9:9 Representation Breaks Down, Shot (2): jump cut to Sono in a different room and pose



9:10 Representation Breaks Down, Shot (3): cut back to Aochi, apparently watching Sono but seated in a totally different area of the sitting room from Shot (1)

For Suzuki, the cinematic ‘powers of the false’ (moments of spatial and temporal ‘impossibility’) themselves represent the uncanny; and yet this encourages us to view the ‘uncanny’ as something more to do with time and cinematic representation than with the supernatural. In this one sequence alone, Aochi wonders whether Sono is a fox, a ghost (*obake*), or, most obviously, a *doppelganger* of Oine (both roles are



played by Ōtani Naoko). But if the house is ‘haunted,’ who is throwing stones at the roof while Sono is cooking in the same room with Aochi? The only other candidate is Nakasago, but he is not yet dead: thus we return obsessively to problems of temporality. Further, how much of the uncanny *mise-en-scène* is the product of Aochi’s imagination, which can only account for what it does not understand by reference to Japanese mythology? In short, can we read all manifestations of the supernatural as mental images of Aochi, or as a purely cinematic expression of his mentality, itself representative of Taishō thought? The film’s visualisation of the supernatural is not simply structured by ‘hesitation’ as to whether supernaturalism can possibly exist, an approach which Todorov described as being at the heart of fantastic narrative.<sup>23</sup> The viewer must content his or herself with a far more radical epistemological uncertainty which infects the whole of the film. Suzuki denies us the means to choose between fragmented supernatural narrative, mental projection, or cinematic self-reflexivity. Ghost, fox, sprite, double, dream, cinema?

Social allegory is also invoked here, establishing a crucial difference in sexual politics between Suzuki and his genre predecessors. Sono’s strange behaviour in the scene may be the result of loneliness and abandonment, for Nakasago has treated her cruelly. But when Suzuki’s montage of ‘haunting’ equates her metonymically with the beggars, a middle class Taishō housewife is related to the socially dispossessed. This is a sentiment which Japan’s first ‘gothic’ writer, Izumi Kyōka, had often expressed.<sup>24</sup> Sono, as a loyal wife, mother, cook, long-suffering victim, embodies every pre-modern stereotype of the Japanese feminine as articulated by the *ryōsai kenbo* (‘loyal wife, good mother’) social code of the Meiji patriarchal order. In this

<sup>23</sup> Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 26-41.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Shirō Inouye, ‘Afterward’ to Izumi Kyōka, *Japanese Gothic Tales*, trans. Inouye (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1996), pp. 162-166.

sense, Suzuki has clearly subjected social norms of domesticity to a process of eerie defamiliarisation.

One way of understanding this gesture is to return to the question of generic causality: who is haunting who, and why? The elliptical narrative provides no clear answers if we compare it to films like *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan* (1959). In this story, and in hundreds of variations, the protagonist mistreats a wife or lover for the purposes of money, social status, or lust. As in the *yakuza* film, the sense of being torn between social advancement and a domestic woman is understood in terms of *giri* and *ninjō*. Suzuki's narrative renders this dichotomy totally irrelevant. But more important is the ideological placement of the feminine. Colette Balmain has discussed whether the female ghost in post-war horror films can be seen as a figure of patriarchal resistance,<sup>25</sup> but she does not address this issue of moral causality. One might argue that the male protagonist of the ghost story is haunted specifically because he has failed to appreciate women who fulfil the roles that patriarchy has prescribed for them: that is, the 'loyal wife, good mother' ideal. The admonition against lust, from Nanboku to Nakagawa, only serves to reaffirm the status quo in terms of gender and marriage. The only victor in such a scenario is neither man nor woman, but the ideology of *on*, or enforced social obligation. Thus the post-war horror film tends to reify the continuity of pre-war gender roles and the ideology of selfless social/familial obligation.

In *Zigeunerweisen*, as we have said, Suzuki rejects the ideological causality of 'the grudge'. After Nakasago dies, the geisha Oine is left alone with Sono's child, Toyoko. Toyoko 'speaks' to her dead father at night and even demands that Aochi return Nakasago's books and records (including the titular Sarasate recording). When

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<sup>25</sup> Balmain, *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film*, pp. 50-70.

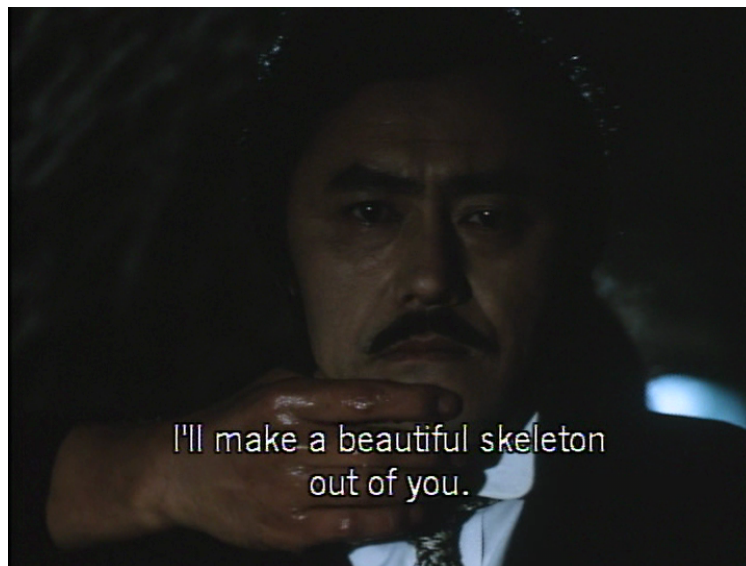
Aochi does so, he finds Oine speaking of her undying, jealous love for Nakasago. ‘He never cared about me....He knew I loved him, but he went back to her.’ She is speaking from the experience not of Oine, but of the dead Sono. She claims that she wants the child to belong to her instead of Nakasago, and appears to have a mental breakdown over this. Oine/Sono claims to have a grudge against Nakasago, but in Suzuki’s perverse ‘inversion’ of the ghost story Nakasago is never the victim of haunting. Indeed, Oine/Sono end up haunted *by* him—through the agent of his daughter—without any cause beyond Nakasago’s preternaturally malicious desire. Moreover, as we have seen, it is Nakasago’s reticent alter-ego, Aochi, who will be haunted by these women. Nakasago and Aochi represent, respectively, the pre-modern and ‘modern’ manifestations of the same patriarchal ideology. But whereas Nakasago is radically individual, a dismissed professor, an itinerant philosopher, an extremist and a criminal, his alter-ego is a professor of German and a teacher at a major military academy: a reluctant cog in the wheel of the Taishō machine, a representative of the university-educated, bureaucratic ‘mandarin’ class which dominated government and mandated the nature and direction of change (or lack of change) at the turn of the century, often despite the strenuous resistance of the lower classes. Perhaps for this reason, he is haunted by the ‘abject.’

*Zigeunerweisen* challenges patriarchy, but unlike Shindō Kaneto’s ghost story *Onibaba* (Tōhō 1964), it does not concentrate its energies on the creation of an imagined pre-modern site of resistance for women. In Suzuki’s satire of the traditional, Oine becomes a portrait of a woman eaten up from the inside by a pre-modern masochism. Like Harumi in *Shunpuden*, she is destroyed by her romantic attachment to the neglectful Nakasago, the embodiment of a pre-modern masculine ‘ideal’ which refuses to die out. In terms of the allowed social roles of the feminine in pre-war



discourse, Oine journeys from one extreme to the other. She begins as a geisha, which for many Taishō intellectuals was a kind of nostalgic exemplar of spiritual and sexual freedom, based on a life of entertaining and ephemeral attachment. She ends up, like Sono, as an isolated widow, so spiritually dependent on her late husband that it has poisoned her relationship with the child. A radical social critique emerges in which marriage and the family structure are demfamiliarised as powerful but dysfunctional pre-modern hangovers. Suzuki emphasises intolerable continuity in a period (Taishō) that popular discourse associated with unstable change and modernisation.

What is most extraordinary is the fact that Aochi, the middle-class male protagonist, is *himself* ‘haunted’ by Nakasago’s out-of-control performance of sexual prowess and controlling desire. Aochi cannot escape this all-consuming male desire that he himself shares.



9:11 Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: the ghostly Nakasago grips Aochi's chin suggestively as he demands Aochi's bones

If Suzuki's focus, in the Nikkatsu films, was on the post-war dissolution of Japanese masculinity, the greater energy of *Zigeunerweisen* lies, accordingly, not in the theme of 'haunting,' but in the allegorical doubling of the male characters.

*Allegories of the Modern: The Double*

Suzuki's use of the *doppelgänger* was mandated by Uchida's source novella, and indeed the figure of the (female) Double is quite common in post-war Japanese horror. But it is important to recognize that the Double, unlike the female ghost, has not been a figure of cultural import since the beginning of recorded history in Japan. Rather, the Double should be viewed as the product of Meiji era cross-cultural fertilization. John Orr has characterized the reappearance of the Double in Nineteenth Century European culture as a process of Othering particular to Romantic literature, a manifestation of anxiety about its own project: 'The Other has become...the phantom which cannot finally be accommodated in the romantic utopia of an organic and pantheistic world. The Other is a hallucination of romantic disorder, an effigy of disintegration.'<sup>26</sup> In Meiji and Taishō Japan, European romanticism was enthusiastically imported by major writers such as Mori Ōgai, Kyōka, and Uchida.<sup>27</sup> Just as the European Other resists the organic unity of the Romantic imagination, so, it could be argued, the uncanny female Other of the modernist Kyōka and Uchida cannot be fully accommodated into the rationalistic Meiji order, nor, finally, into the crude transcendental order of the Shōwa Imperial State which was to follow, *despite* the fact that popular imperial discourse traded on nativism and irrationalism. The suicide of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke in 1927, Uchida's friend and an alleged model for the character of Nakasago, was symbolic in this regard.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Izumi Kyōka and his critics alike recognized Victor Hugo as the literary antecedent to his own creation of a 'Japanese gothic': Charles Shirō Inouye 'Afterward' to *Japanese Gothic Tales*, pp. 161-2. Mishima Yukio compared Kyōka's use of the doppelgänger motif to that of E.T.A. Hoffmann: Inouye, 'Introduction' to *Japanese Gothic Tales*, p. 7. Uchida produced scholarly translations of the German romantics.

<sup>28</sup> The relationship between Uchida and Akutagawa is fictionalized in Uchida's short story 'Yamakata bōshi,' or 'The Bowler Hat'. Akutagawa's prophetic unease with the direction society was taking is echoed by Uchida's own later struggles with the nationalist politicization of literature and academia; he was fired, in 1934, from Hōsei University for resistance to the firing of his boss, and in 1942 refused to join a patriotic writer's union; DiNitto, *Uchida Hyakken*, pp. 9, 16, 26, 200, 206.

The Robot Maria in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (UFA, 1927) is the ultimate 'effigy of romantic disintegration,' a figure of revolution, disorder, and female sexuality who cannot be contained by patriarchal structures nor, ultimately, by her creators. Suzuki's Sono/Oine is another Double let loose on the Taishō middle class; yet the patriarchal order ambiguously reified at the end of *Metropolis*, and here represented by Aochi, implodes upon contact with a female agency and sexuality which literally 'disorders' its version of reality. But in modernist cinema, as Orr notes, the Double is not only the disordered image of the middle class but also 'a technical fact' of the cinematic apparatus. If the Double is the female abject of patriarchy, it is also the immediacy of the cinematic viewing experience interrupted or 'haunted' by the mediation of a mechanical 'Other' like Robot Maria: the camera itself.

The motif of the *doppelgänger* also applies to Aochi and Nakasago. Both are representatives of Meiji/Taishō Japan, but Nakasago's power is configured in terms of 'cultural capital' (the pre-modern past) while Aochi's is economic (bourgeois and academic status). Aochi wears impeccable tweed suits while Nakasago wears a tattered black kimono. And yet, a binary opposition between the two is not adequate. Nakasago is not so much a remnant of the past as a romanticised representation of it in the mind of the modernist author Aochi (a thinly-veiled representation of Uchida himself).

Aochi's social existence is solidly middle class. He is separated from his own unstable imagination and from the abject inherent in Japanese folk culture (Nakasago and the beggars) by class and consumerism. His institutional status, appearance, and marriage of convenience to a *modan* girl all seem meant to mediate desire, while his Europeanised *châtelet* insulates him, as in an ivory tower, from Japan. But this bourgeois identity is a shackle for Aochi; he has none of the freedom of movement

and freedom from commitment that Nakasago enjoys. Most importantly, in a familiar *nuberu bagu* scenario, it represses him sexually. Non-linear images of the women in his life appear with subliminal rapidity, as if Aochi's respectability has displaced sexual activity to 'another' realm (*kono-ya*) of the visual only. Aochi is happy to 'view' his desires vicariously through the actions of Nakasago, at once seductive and violent towards women. This initiates the inherent reflexivity of the cinematic theme of the Double. Nakasago is, more or less, Aochi's Id. But, like the cinema viewer, Aochi is the outwardly passive 'viewer' of the erotic and violent spectacle of Nakasago, the identity that must be kept at a distance.

Accordingly, the film's notable breakdowns in spatio-temporal continuity occur when Aochi watches behaviour of Nakasago. For example, in Kamakura, Aochi sits nearby as Nakasago grabs Oine:



9:12 Violence at a Distance, Shot (1): Aochi discreetly gets up, but turns back to gaze at Oine's 'seduction'



9:13 Violence at a Distance, Shot (2): the vampirical Nakasago moves to kiss (or bite?) Oine's neck, but is distracted by something off-screen



9:13 Violence at a Distance, Shot (3): Aochi, who was standing in front of the lovers in Shot (1), is now a distant figure on the sea-cliff in the background

At key moments such as this, it is clear that Aochi's gaze serves to 'authorize' Nakasago's behaviour at the expense of Oine, to whom Aochi himself is attracted. But at the same time, as in the cinema, a distance must be kept for the 'enjoyment' to remain vicarious and controlled.

The Romantic motif of the Double as Other may help us to understand how Aochi's guilty indulgence in his alter-ego Nakasago becomes an existential crises that strands him somewhere between Japan's (pre-modern) past and (capitalist) present. In

John Orr's Freudian reading of the Double, the impossible desire to repeat the past, that is, the attempt to bridge 'a gap between past and present in which nothingness intercedes,' must be equalled by the desire to escape that very same impulse.<sup>29</sup> Aochi wants to return to, or *repeat*, the pre-modern imaginary which informs his sexual desire, while at the same time to escape from it and preserve his social identity. Rachel DiNitto underscores this cycle of unbearable separation from the past, repression of it, and compulsive return: 'The characters in the film are haunted by a past (history) that is always morphing and moving away from them. They are always reliving certain events and re-seeing certain images in an endless process of replication.'<sup>30</sup> This process reduplicates the personal past in the form of the national past and vice versa. The more that Aochi's bourgeois identity pulls him away from the abject sexuality of Nakasago, the more his sanctuary crumbles around him. Not only does he come to believe that his ultra-consumerist wife is sleeping with Nakasago, but Aochi himself ends up stranded between two worlds, whether those of the living and dead (as in Uchida's neo-gothic stories), the past and the present, or the real and imagined, i.e., memory and fantasy. Aochi encounters Nakasago's child on a bridge, where she tells him, 'My father is alive. You think you're alive, but you're dead. Give me your bones as you promised- let's go!' The horrified Aochi attempts to turn and walk away, only to find, in the film's final act of discontinuity, that he is staring at Toyoko on a beach, standing beside a boat covered in a funereal wreath.

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<sup>29</sup> Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> DiNitto, 'Translating Pre-war Culture into Film: The Double Vision of Suzuki Seijun's *Zigeunerweisen*', *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30 (Winter 2004), p. 41.



9:14 The End

But is Aochi literally dead, or has he been emotionally and spiritually dead all along, while the socially liberated ‘spirit’ of Nakasago remains very much alive? In this ‘new’ age of commodity and the machine, are we all, perhaps, living the life of the phantom?

The double motif thus amounts to Suzuki’s critique of desire under capitalism. As Orr has written in reference to the films of Antonioni, commodification may result in the kind of ‘split personality’ that bedevils Aochi, leading to the ‘loss of selfhood’:

The decentred self lives out the...contradiction between economic and cultural capital. Here the dominant fear is the fear of being petrified into the fixed value of a commodity. The image of the double is the hope and lure of a multivalent desire which cannot congeal into a market price....Evil remains the supreme form of moral transgression but...it generates mere banalities.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the bourgeois Aochi is a normative point of identification for the author, director, and 1980s viewer, Suzuki has stacked his deck in favour of the transgressive and murderous Nakasago. But why? Surely this cannot be the simplistic

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<sup>31</sup> Orr, p. 39.



distinction between institutional patriarch and violent ‘lone wolf’ that Suzuki rejected in *Koroshi no rakuin*?



9:15 What Price (Male) Freedom? The crimes of the rakish, attractive Nakasago are laid out for the viewer—or is it a fantasy of the protagonist?

Rather, just as there is no longer a ‘morality’ to haunting, there are no clear moral demarcations between Aochi and Nakasago.<sup>32</sup> Both desire the same transgression, and the only difference between them, on the diegetic level, is that between vision and action. On an allegorical level, if the hypnotic Nakasago embodies the indulgence of the male cinema viewer in violent but lavishly aesthetic spectacle, Aochi is the spectator’s guilty prurience. It follows then, that Aochi may represent a post-1960’s liberal guilt at being taken in by cinema, if, for ‘cinema,’ we understand the gendered and violent discourse of Nikkatsu and other genre cinemas. By forgiving Nakasago and punishing Aochi, Suzuki evidently does not want to make the male spectator feel guilty, but to make him honest: not disavowing, but accepting. And yet, if Suzuki is

<sup>32</sup> Orr argues that the doubling involved in the identification/separation of the cinema viewer from the screen entails a consequent moral/ideological ambiguity in terms of narrative: ‘It is no wonder that doubles onscreen obliquely divide the loyalties of the viewer, even when there are clear moral demarcations’: *Cinema and Modernity*, p. 42.



addressing the male spectator in this way, the question arises: what form should this ‘acceptance’ of our anti-social desires take? This is a crucial question for the Suzuki project in its late, and most introspective, phase. Clearly Suzuki has not made such an unconventional picture as *Zigeunerweisen* in order to accept those linear, patriarchal structures of desire that fill the studio genre pictures against which he famously rebelled?

*Violence and Evanescence: Representing the Past*

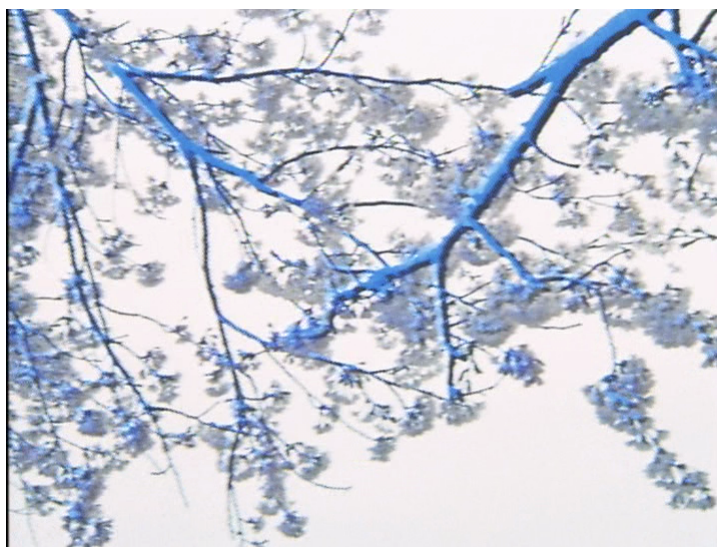
*Zigeunerweisen* seems to be aligned with Charles Shirō Inouye’s view that Japanese culture alternates between two deep ideological structures. The first, which can be called evanescence, involves living under ‘the order of the here and now,’ the appreciation of the ephemeral, and is best epitomised by the Floating World of the Edo period middle class, with its worldly but transient pleasures. The second is ‘the order of the transcendental,’ first introduced by religious and elite martial philosophy. This structure came to exert a hegemony over culture in the Meiji era in the form of emperor worship, and was essentially forced on culture from the top down through the Imperial State, so much so that even the Edo pleasures of tea, kabuki, and the geisha were re-imagined as ‘universal values’ in the intellectual culture of the late empire.<sup>33</sup> Inouye credits the entrenchment of the transcendental order as a prime factor in Japan’s imperial disaster, and it should be no surprise that Suzuki’s negative aesthetic prefers the realm of the ‘here and now’ to the transcendental. As an establishment figure paranoiacally obsessed with the ‘other realm’, Aochi represents transcendental thinking, but is literally pursued by ephemeral images of desire and fear. His interpretation of reality—the consensual reality of the middle class—is increasingly undermined by a cinematic representation of ‘the here and now’ in the

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<sup>33</sup> Inouye, *Evanescence and Form* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 122-127.

form of repetition and the Deleuzian sense of ‘simultaneous presents,’ as discussed in Chapter Eight.

With his wandering in search of pleasure, violence, and the spectacle of both, Nakasago may seem like Aochi’s opposite, but in fact he is a mirror image. In a motif which Suzuki added to the storyline, Nakasago says that, despite his philandering, he actually despises human flesh and prefers the ‘pure’ and everlasting pleasure of bones. This is Nakasago’s own desire for transcendence—sexual and patriarchal tyranny viewed as pure aesthetics—but Suzuki will disabuse us of it. Nakasago decisively returns to the order of the here and now upon his lonesome, drug-addled death. This apotheosis of the *nagaremono* ideal is surrounded by a rapid montage of cherry blossoms and Mt. Fuji in the throes of miraculous transformation, accompanied by expressive non-diegetic colour changes and nonsensical folk chanting.



9:16 Miraculous Transformation: cherry blossoms, defamiliarised by non-diegetic colour, as multivalent symbols of death/change/ephemerality

The scene, which plays on commonplace cultural notions of Zen enlightenment, is metaphorically a ‘fireworks’ display of the Suzuki aesthetic. Nakasago’s death/enlightenment/ return to the ‘here and now’ also returns us to the question of

cinematic reflexivity. While alive, Nakasago espouses the idea that bones and ashes can turn red if they soak up the blood of a dying man. The impressionable Aochi becomes convinced that this is true of Nakasago's own ashes, only to be told by Oine that the ashes are, in fact, just plain white. This is a critical point at which material reality cuts through the dreamlike grip of the transcendental, and it suggests that the only possible articulation of 'reality' must come from outside the aesthetic world of the film, that is, from Suzuki's authorial intervention. Small wonder, then, that Suzuki's own ironic voice intrudes on the soundtrack at the moment of Nakasago's enlightenment, making critical comments like 'Not finished yet?'

Perhaps the possibility of 'accepting ourselves,' and the violent fantasies which cinema fulfils for us, can only be actualised not through the 'regressive' milieu of studio genre, but through Suzuki's own 'new kind of film,' which, after all, differentiated itself from the mainstream cinema on virtually every level, even that of distribution. Just as Suzuki's allegories of ghosts and doubles are always allegories of the cinema, I would argue further that Suzuki is always defining and defending his own cinematic practice even in the midst of its realization. The self-reflexivity that attends the concept of the Double thus translates into artistic self-exaltation, an inward-turning will-to-power. As John Orr puts it:

Despite its obvious powers of illusion, the camera still records 'nature' in its broadest anthropological sense. But the modern cinema of the double builds on that anthropology by transforming it. Representation becomes a will-to-power and the figure of the double one of its vital legacies...Refusal to recognize this is itself but a romantic failing.<sup>34</sup>

Orr helps us to recognise how the independent Suzuki declared his difference from a major strand of the 1960s *nuberu bagu*. Among that movement's apparent cultural aims—not counting those, like Wakamatsu, who sought a 'primitive' image of

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<sup>34</sup> Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*, p. 44.

irrational violence—was an image practice that would enable an *Escape from Japan* (Yoshida, 1964), a subjective or epistemic break with an internalised history of authoritarianism that effectively encouraged and neutralized violent dissent (i.e. the tradition of rebellion from the right). Diverging from this tendency, Suzuki and his purely predatory antihero Nakasago take it that the past is as indispensable as it is irretrievable. The past is desire, all the more so for being viewed as ‘past’ and thereby forbidden (or made abject) by modernity. Representation is a will to power which takes that desire as its object. For Suzuki, you suppress the past, in the name of rational politics, at your own risk—it will come back to haunt you. The question of a cinema ethic then becomes one of how to destabilize the cinema’s representation of ‘pastness’—the achievement, as we shall see, of *Kagerō-za*—to the extent that power no longer recognises its usual tools. Images of (male) desire are re-inserted into the politics of the image, but on the condition of sacrificing entirely the cinema’s claim of privileged relation to the actual—the documentary impulse which the *nuberu bagu* had interrogated but never abandoned.<sup>35</sup> For Suzuki, the problem of narrative cinema is not, in the end, the existence of abject male fantasies of empowerment, but their fetishistic claims to representation and truth.

## II. A NEW KIND OF FILM: A-HISTORY and NON-NARRATIVE IN *KAGERŌ-ZA*

### *Representation and History From Zigeunerweisen to Kagerō-za*

At one point in *Zigeunerweisen*, Aochi and Nakasago listen to a record of Pablo Sarasate playing his own composition, *Zigeunerweisen*. Nakasago points out

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<sup>35</sup> cf. Standish, *Politics, Porn, and Protest*, pp. 120-144, for the theoretical and aesthetic conundrums that the major *nuberu bagu* documentarists (Imamura, Hara, Ōshima) encountered, and often highlighted, in two decades of documentary practice. The more recent discourses in film theory on ‘reflexive’ and ‘performative’ documentaries do not, in my view, entirely resolve or do away with the uncertainties of the ‘non-fiction’ representational mode that the *nuberu bagu* encountered (as Standish ably represents).

that Sarasate's voice can be heard on the record, but that no one can make out what he says. The gesture invokes discourses of the technological uncanny, but its broader implications for historical and cinematic representation are also significant. In the form of the voice on the record, the past is still present, as is the trace of a personality and artistic will; but it is also profoundly unreadable. This scene is later paralleled by the scene of 'haunting' in which the record player is given visual prominence in a notable tracking shot through Nakasago's ghostly home.



9:17 The Phonograph as Technological Uncanny

On one level, we interpret Nakasago's strange 'survival' after death in the light of the equally ambivalent 'survival' of Sarasate on the record.<sup>36</sup> On another level, however, the motif of the record player seems to problematise, or literally to 'haunt' the act of representation. Is Suzuki's vision of Taishō, despite an impressive collection of period objects and artefacts which clutter the *mise-en-scène*, a mere phantom?

<sup>36</sup> Miryam Sas describes the allegorical use of the mechanical in the work of 1960s avant-garde filmmaker Terayama Shūji as revealing 'the role of technology and the machine in maintaining these social structures of mastery': Sas, *Experimental Arts in Post-war Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2011), p. 46. This recalls the exploitative Nakasago and the use of tape recorders by Killer Number One in *Koroshi no rakuin*.

Harootunian generalises that ‘thinkers and writers responded to Japan's modernity by describing it as a doubling that imprinted a difference between the new demands of capitalism...and the force of received forms of history and cultural patterns...’<sup>37</sup> As Rachel DiNitto points out, it is this sense of ‘doubling’ that Suzuki deploys in *Zigeunerweisen*.<sup>38</sup> She argues, further, that Suzuki questions the possibility of representing history:

*Zigeunerweisen* takes it as a given that history is...ultimately beyond our grasp.... The past is not necessarily missing for Suzuki, but if it can be apprehended, it is only through this slippery double structure. It is in this setting that Suzuki constructs his wildly associative, surrealistic recreation of the prewar.<sup>39</sup>

This holds true for the second film of the trilogy, *Kagerō-za*. The film is a visual catalogue of past cultural artefacts and practices (jazz, imported dance and dress styles, railway carriages, antique rifles, Taishō anarchism), as well as mythological objects and settings (stone bridges, theatre masks, clay dolls). The film does not set out to represent a historical period, however, but to discourse upon a historical imaginary. While *Kagerō-za*, too, invokes allegories of haunting and doubling to convey the elusive and multiple nature of our sense of the past, it re-emphasises what was nascent in *Zigeunerweisen*: a radical negation of narrative causality and diegesis, and a privileging of images which are excessively ‘mediated,’ that is, mediated through dominant pre-war art forms (theatre, dance, painting). By denying the possibility of an ‘unmediated’ original or an organic, causal and therefore knowable recreation of ‘pastness,’ Suzuki challenges historical representation directly, by literally and figuratively refusing a stable ‘image’ of the milieu.

<sup>37</sup> H.D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Pre-war Japan* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), p. xvii.

<sup>38</sup> DiNitto, ‘Translating Pre-war Culture Into Film’, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> DiNitto, p. 41

In the previous section I extended DiNitto's conclusions by arguing that Suzuki's allegories of the phantom and the double are also allegories of cinema. Suzuki does not confine himself to the problem of representing history, but questions the possibility, even the desirability, of representing any form of narrative at all. In Suzuki's late films, representation is always unutterably *other* to what it represents, and that may be their strongest legacy. In *Zigeunerweisen*, as we have seen, when an onscreen red lantern flashes but the non-diegetic light which appears is not red, Suzuki challenges the representation of 'the actual' (physical reality) on the level of the individual shot. In *Kagerō-za*, Suzuki uses montage specifically to challenge the possibility of representing a clear succession in time, irrespective of relation to a historical or personal past. Through a double distortion of continuity and narrative causality, successions in time are refused their integrity, for Suzuki has posited that such integrity is false.

Such a strategy has consequences for the historical representation of Taishō but also, as Deleuze points out, for the conventional 'cinematic present' as well, refusing the function of montage that renders the inherent instability of our sense of present into a continuous past (narrative),<sup>40</sup> instead maintaining, like the voice on the Sarasate record, a mysterious and alluring illegibility.

Reading the progression of this search for an 'illegible' image/montage practice from *Zigeunerweisen* through *Kagerō-za* to *Yumeji*, one is struck by the fact that it was not the endpoint of the journey, but the cinematic exploration itself, that has proved of lasting cultural value. *Zigeunerweisen* was a milestone in Japanese cultural history: *Yumeji* was somewhat overlooked; *Kagerō-za* was, in every way, in-

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<sup>40</sup> On the definition of a 'present' tense in cinema, Deleuze refers to Pasolini's theory of film: 'That the present is the sole direct time of the cinematographic image seems...almost a truism...Pasolini...maintain[s] [that] because it selects and co-ordinates "significant moments," montage has the property of "making the present past," of transforming our unstable and uncertain present into a "clear, stable and desirable past," in short of achieving time.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 36.

between. Certainly between the final two films, Suzuki had in some sense ‘achieved’ not merely a post-classical, but an extraordinarily autonomous image practice outside of a classical concept of narration: a permanent ‘leaving behind’ of this classical cinema in favour of a catalogue of surrealist happening and association. A teleological, ‘progressive’ reading of this authorship is therefore tempting but, finally, reductive. Certainly for the purposes of our investigation of Suzuki’s cinematic ‘past,’ and similarly for the introspective Japanese discourses of the day, it is not *Yumeji*’s ‘maximal point of differentiation’ that is essential; rather, the first two films—in all their continuities with the Nikkatsu years—have claims to their own, at least equal significance as the legacy of Late Suzuki. *Zigeunerweisen* represents a ‘working through’ the allegories and structures of ‘doubling’; *Kagerō-za* builds on this duality a refusal of narrative that depends, in a negative and reflexive mode (as discussed in Chapter One), on the viewer’s familiarity with and expectation of narrative. *Kagerō-za* marks out, in other words, a sliding, morphological, in a word *transitional* authorship, lying somewhere between studio and avant-garde practice, between tradition and iconoclasm, narrative and spectacle: an independent authorship not as the binary and theoretical opposite of studio practice, but as an unending, unsatisfied questing after the (cinematic) encounter, in all its multiplicative facets and uncertainties, in its joining with prior modes and in its excesses and departures from them. *Kagerō-za* is to Suzuki’s past and future what Taishō is to Japan’s past and future: an enticing middle ground. I shall now enumerate the textual features and contours of this ‘new’ and yet ‘in-between’ image practice, but with an eye towards how it continues and (inevitably) rereads Suzuki’s negative aesthetic of the past.



### *Non-Narrative and Un-Knowing*

Returning to Suzuki's oft-quoted remark about a cinema which can be likened to the joys of sleeping and dreaming,<sup>41</sup> we may understand how, for Suzuki, the aesthetic of negation is inextricably, if not causally, linked to polysemic images, that is, images that afford a multiplication of interpretive possibility. In *Kagerō-za*, these images represent human behaviour and understanding as wrapped, to use a well-known Buddhist phrase, in a cloud of unknowing. Removed from any obvious narrative context, the image takes on the multiplicity of meaning to which, in Suzuki's established anti-realist philosophy, it is essentially suited.

What then, does *Kagerō-za* offer in place of narrative? The film may be best described as 'happenings,' a series of images and events which are anchored by the perception and reaction of the central character, *shinpa* playwright Matsuzaki (Matsuda Yūsaku). What little continuity is offered to us is rooted in the ubiquity of a perceiving subject. Some few onscreen events (for example, the second Mrs. Tamawaki appears to watch the funeral procession of the first Mrs. Tamawaki) do not appear to be from the POV of Matsuzaki, but Matsuzaki is never, spatially, distant from these events, and some of them are probably in his mind.

Matsuzaki is orbited by a limited number of characters whom he observes, framed in a limited number of *transitional* and historically indeterminate settings in Tokyo and Kanazawa: a stone bridge, a flight of steps to a shrine, a country road; and at the beginning, some fleeting, feverish spaces of the modern city that are entirely owned by the *zaibatsu* (big conglomerate) fat cat Tamawaki (Nakamura Katsuo). Dialogue often accompanies these images, but of a special kind: the characters, as if anticipating the cinema viewers, constantly question the meaning and ontological

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<sup>41</sup> Suzuki (from the magazine *Cinema '69*) in Satō, *Currents of Japanese Cinema*, p. 228.

status of visual events. Sometimes they propose explanations of these events which are completely unsatisfying both to Matsuzaki and to the viewer. Nothing penetrates the cloud of unknowing, which is perhaps why Matsuzaki as a protagonist is uniquely passive and reactive. Things happen to Matsuzaki; he never initiates an action or clearly takes a position. He is constantly gazing, with a wide-eyed stare, at the actions of others, constantly responding to their questions and telegrams. Even at the two most crucial points, when Matsuzaki may (or may not) have had sex with Tamawaki Shinako (Ōkusu Michiyo), and when he may (or may not) have attempted a double suicide with her, the body of Matsuzaki is literally being ‘pulled’ into position by an invisible force, a *deus ex machina* which forcibly acts upon Matsuzaki’s chronic, intellectualized non-participation in events, possibly in accordance with his inner desires.

The causality that binds one scene of the film to another is extraordinarily loose, and the viewer is often not given the means to determine what has happened, diegetically, between the often baffling ellipses which crop up between and within individual scenes. We are continually tantalized with the possibility of a diegesis, of a narrative connecting disparate events, only to be disappointed. Certain conventional deployments of the *mise-en-scène* give the viewer the hope of a causal narrative structure: several long sequence shots are used to represent scenes of extended dialogue (e.g. the scenes between Matsuzaki and Madame Mio). These dialogues are a further ‘enticement’ to play the erotetic game of narrative.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, taking into account disjunctions between sound and image, only roughly half of the edits in the film can be said to establish a conventional narrative continuity.

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<sup>42</sup> Keiko I. McDonald defines ‘erotetic’ narration in film, a structural framework first proposed by Noël Carroll, thusly: ‘The audience is expected to frame narrative questions about the fictional world of the film, especially cause/effect chains....The key issue...is narrative intelligibility’: *Classical Japanese Theatre in Films*, p. 13.

The viewer is often given intimations of narrative events that may have happened off-screen. We are told that the first wife of Tamawaki was German, and that he forced her, in an outrageous patriarchal crime, to take on the hair-colour, skin-colour, and eye-colour of an ordinary Japanese. But this only opens up a host of questions: What happened to Ine? Is she dead (as reported by the hospital staff) or alive (since Matsuzaki and the viewer have seen her)? If Matsuzaki has seen Ine's ghost, is this indeed 'a story of ghosts and grudges,' as Tamawaki satirically characterizes the film that he is in? If so, whom does Ine have a grudge against? What is her relation to the second wife, Shinako, who is seen bringing flowers picked from the local cemetery to Ine's hospital bed? Suzuki builds up the possibility of erotic narration—a question and answer structure—only to frustrate it; the 'real' structure in place here is incapable of, and uninterested in, answers. But as Deleuze contends, the negation of narrative meaning is also, in a sense, the multiplication of narrative and meaning.<sup>43</sup> In place of one narrative, we have images of multiple possible narratives. But as new possibilities branch off at every point, the viewer must despair of the Aristotelian desire to know, to have one causal explanation of what they see. This would be tantamount to mastery over the image, and Suzuki refuses us this conventional pleasure. With sound and image divorced from spatial and temporal continuity, we return to a 'primitive' or 'magic' cinematic spectacle observed through the tatters of narrative; yet for all this, the human interest generated by the gestures and interaction of the actors does not disappear.

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<sup>43</sup> For Deleuze, the experience of time logically obliges us to accept that the past 'is not necessarily true.' Therefore, by presenting a multiplicity of 'virtual' or 'not necessarily true' versions of the past, a non-chronological narrative cinema 'produces movements necessarily abnormal, essentially "false", ' in order to 'decompose the relations in a direct time image in such a way that all the possible movements emerge from it.' *Cinema 2: The Movement Image*, p. 130 (cf. Chapter Eight).

### *The Structure of Kagerō-za*

Various traditional Japanese arts, from *ikebana* flower arrangement to the Noh theatre, partake of a tripartite structure which is termed *jo-ha-kyū*. The structure has various aesthetic interpretations relating to rhythm and other qualities. The surrealist avant-garde filmmaker Katsu Kanai has also claimed that this unified triptych is also a form of cosmological allegory, with one part representing ‘heaven’ or divinity, one part representing earth or nature, and one part representing man<sup>44</sup>. This allegorical pattern applies neatly to the tripartite structure of *Kagerō-za*. Each part is roughly forty minutes. The first, taking place in Tokyo, may be said to represent humanity, especially in its focus on relationships of erotic attraction, romantic attachment, or marriage. The second part, on the rural outskirts of Kanazawa, certainly enacts a discourse of nature. The third part, an amateur stage performance, represents the marriage of art and the divine in the traditional Japanese theatre.

Of these, perhaps the discourse of nature is most surprising for a Suzuki film. When Matsuzaki arrives in Kanazawa in the middle part of the film, his interactions with others is on country roads and foggy marshes, those nebulous boundaries between land and sea. Nature is represented, also, in the character of an earthy, lusty, anarchist played by Harada Yoshio. Even in a film full of uncertainties, Suzuki’s treatment of anarchism—a notable strain of Taishō political culture and the one closest to what we can make of Suzuki’s own politics<sup>45</sup>—is notably ambiguous. Harada’s character walks along an old dirt road and stops to urinate in a beggar’s cup.<sup>46</sup> The beggar, however, is also played by Harada, perhaps unconsciously

<sup>44</sup> In a lecture at the Bethnal Green Working Man’s Club in London on 28 July 2011, Katsu claimed that his three major features (*Mujin rettō/The Desert Archipelago*, *Good-bye*, and *Ōkoku/The Kingdom*, 1969-1973) made up a *jo-ha-kyū* triptych.

<sup>45</sup> cf. Suzuki, ‘The Desert Under the Cherry Tree,’ in Suzuki and Hasumi, *The Desert Under the Cherry Tree*, p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> These scatological gestures recall the writer Sakaguchi Ango’s highly influential post-war concept of decadence (*daraku*), a kind of resistance to power (or opting out of power) through self-annihilating acts of degeneracy and

visualising this ambivalence. Certainly, for Suzuki, the figure of the anarchist, associated with symbols of the bodily and the transient (i.e. the vulgar and ancient clay figures that the anarchists like to smash), separates the discourse of nature from the discourse of tradition.



9:18 Anarchism and Earthiness: a solemn ceremony in which anarchists view and then smash traditional clay figures, inside of which lie smaller, vulgar sculptures, for example a penis, or a man being swallowed by a vagina

Tradition, itself, is divided between the folk customs and superstitions which Matsuzaki encounters in Kanazawa (epitomized by the motif of the *matsuri*, or village festival) and the hierarchical-authoritarian social tradition represented by Tamawaki. This cynical industrialist, who is visually associated with Tokyo, would gladly erase tradition just as he erases nature with his ubiquitous hunting rifle.



9:19 The Consequence of Power: the haunting corpses of birds on Tamawaki's estate

These two ‘branches’ of the traditional might be roughly configured as patriarchy and as a mythic structure older and deeper than patriarchy, one ambiguously centred on the symbol of female sexuality.

### III. THEATRE AS ALLEGORY

#### *Hybridity, Ideology, and Magical Transformation*

The third part of the film consists of Matsuzaki viewing a lengthy theatre performance put on by itinerant children in a Kanazawa warehouse. The performance contains loose and freely imaginative renderings of various forms of Japanese classical theatre, including kabuki, *bunraku*, and local festival performance. *Shinpa*, the ‘modernised’ Meiji theatre practised by Matsuzaki, is conspicuously absent. The performance loosely synthesizes these multiple theatrical forms to create new aesthetic ideas. But it is also, crucially, a pastiche, as is obvious from the fact that the first two acts are performed by amateur children.<sup>47</sup> Pastiche was as important to

<sup>47</sup> Suzuki had originated the motif of children performing traditional theatre in the festival sequence of *Kutabare gurentai* (1960).

avant-garde theatre performance in the 1960s as it had been essential to the pre-war Asakusa theatre of Suzuki's youth.<sup>48</sup> The scene resembles the performances of the 'Red Tent' theatre in which Arato Genjirō had participated, given to creative representations of Noh and other classical forms.<sup>49</sup> Here, Suzuki and Arato capitalize on certain aspects of the inherent intertextuality of pastiche: as the play is utilised to retell the story of Tamawaki and his wives in a theatrical idiom, a story which the film *Kagerō-za* has given us mere glimpses of, it becomes a reflexive comment on the film and its structure, and hence on the cinema in general. The play is an avatar of the discourses of the film: the rejection of realism; the ideological relation between art (theatre) and the sacred; and the positioning of gender within that relation, i.e. traditional and artistic representations of femininity.

In *Zigeunerweisen*, Suzuki laid the sound of theatrical clappers over the soundtrack of scenes which had nothing to do with the theatre, thus transforming the 'mimetic' into the theatrical. Suzuki reverses that procedure here: cinema explores the limits of theatrical expression and, indeed, extends the theatrical aesthetic in a particular direction: the cinema's capacity, through editing, to convey uncanny transformation.

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<sup>48</sup> Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, pp. 237-48. Silverberg uses the terms 'code-switching' and 'montage,' as in 'cultural montage,' rather than the term pastiche; these terms signify the abrupt and rapid juxtapositions of different and opposed aspects of culture, including, crucially, what was deemed 'traditional' and what was deemed 'Western': Silverberg, pp. 28-35.

<sup>49</sup> Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, pp. 260-1.



9:20 Miraculous Transformation (II): Shinako turns into a life-sized *bunraku* puppet in the middle of the performance

Suzuki has often been said to use theatrical effects in his films, derived largely from his beloved kabuki.<sup>50</sup> In certain respects this is clearly accurate: for example, the manner in which the sets fall away, like theatrical flats, to reveal what is behind them in *Kantō mushuku* and *Zigeunerweisen*. The long held and almost frozen poses of the action hero in *Kanto mushuku* (see Figure 1:1) and *Tokyo nagaremono* resemble the dramatic tableaux of the hero in the Edo-based *aragoto* style of kabuki performance.<sup>51</sup> *Irezumi ichidai* stages its major sequence of heroism in a long corridor which the camera tracks down from a high angle; this resonates with a major piece of kabuki architecture, the *hanamichi*, a hallway down which the actor would enter and exit, posing along the way.

In the deeper sense of *mise-en-scène*, however, Suzuki is clearly not theatrical in any conventional sense. His aesthetic is opposed to the kind of frontal, proscenium

<sup>50</sup> Suzuki in Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book* (Berkeley: Stonebridge Press, 2003), p. 101. In this interview Suzuki does compare his aesthetic to kabuki as a way of contrasting it to American films, but only in the general sense of camera placement that is determined by setting rather than the movement of the individual character. This could also be said of a broad swathe of transnational (and especially European) filmmaking styles.

<sup>51</sup> The *aragoto* or 'rough' style of kabuki performance is characterized by exaggerated gesture and was pioneered by Edo actor Ichikawa Danjūrō I (1660-1704) as a contrast to the *wagoto* or 'soft' style of performance used by Osaka and Kyoto performers.



staging that Burch has written about in regards to the Taishō silent cinema.<sup>52</sup> Suzuki at Nikkatsu increasingly emphasised ‘odd’, de-centred angles of framing and spontaneous and ‘incomplete’ compositions (*Koroshi no rakuin*). Although Suzuki employs a frontal angle during the children’s performance, he has compromised this very strategy by creatively breaking the fourth wall that proscenium staging implies. The children in the audience are as much a part of the performance as the children onstage, and at one point rush onstage themselves. More importantly, Suzuki cuts from a frontal angle of the stage to a diagonal composition that shows both the stage and the backstage wings at once.<sup>53</sup> This framing reveals Shinako, formerly a viewer of the play, in the wings and interacting with the onstage players:



9:21 Breaking the Wall: stage and backstage dynamically interacting in the same frame, from the POV of the audience

<sup>52</sup> Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, pp. 81, 84-5, 108-9; cf. Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Cinema* (Kodansha, 2001), pp. 22-3. Donald Kiriwara ‘Kabuki, Cinema, and Mizoguchi Kenji’ offers a more thorough treatment of theatrical mise-en-scène as adapted or altered on film, but only in reference to Mizoguchi’s films of the 1930s: in Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp, eds., *Cinema and Language* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1983), pp. 97-106.

<sup>53</sup> The mise-en-scène of the amateur performance can be usefully contrasted to the earlier theatrical performance *within* the film, Tamawaki’s fan dance, which is quite plainly filmed in a sequence shot with proscenium staging.

The male characters, in contrast, are not allowed onstage, thus gendering both the performance and its ideological thrust. In fact, some of the audience members—a dirty *yakuza* with a strange, feminised voice and a dwarf who, between shots, morphs into Suzuki's favourite actor Tamagawa Isao—actively prevent Matsuzaki from getting on stage. As for Tamawaki, when his patriarchal crimes are depicted by the children onstage, he shoots his rifle at them in a hysterical re-assertion of phallic power which the children then 'magically' incorporate into their performance as if it had been anticipated.



9:22 'Hysterically Phallic' Capitalism: Tamawaki shoots off his rifle 'from the hip' at anything resembling the feminine or natural

From these examples one gleans a 'participatory' theatre, long cherished by the avant-garde of the 1960s and designed to break the distance between the stage and the passive audience in moments of politically and aesthetically destabilizing 'engagement.'<sup>54</sup>

Even more crucial is the relation posited between avant-garde theatre and classical theatre. David G. Goodman has explored the notion of a 'Return of the Gods'

<sup>54</sup> Sas, *Experimental Arts in Post-war Japan*, pp. xiv, 3.

in Japanese avant-garde theatre.<sup>55</sup> Goodman's phrase describes an avant-garde theatre that intended to be 'rooted in tradition,' that would reject the 'secular realism' of *shingeki*, and yet not 'for the purpose of a religious revival....but as a process to liberate Japanese ghosts, i.e. Japanese gods as a symbol of Japanese archetypal, aesthetic, socio-psychological heritage... not to affirm them, but to acknowledge and negate them.'<sup>56</sup>

Here Suzuki adapts precisely this aspect of the avant-garde theatre which was already critical to his project: the deep structures which perpetuate power both within and without. It is no poor description of Suzuki's cinematic project to say that it is meant to visualise such structures (ritualised violence, for example) 'not to affirm them, but to acknowledge and negate them.' In *Kagerō-za*'s allegory of theatre, Suzuki questions whether there is a necessary relation between the sacred, which manifested itself in the 'Transcendental Order' of Meiji and Taishō Japan and its revival of concepts of sacrifice and suicidal honour, and the aesthetic, which in the history of kabuki traded so heavily on represented violence. Can the two be separated? Does Suzuki wish to interrogate the role of art in transmitting the claims of myth throughout modern Japan, or does he simply revel in these colourful, dynamic, and 'magical' theatrical forms through which religious belief is made visible, perhaps expiated in the process, and, certainly, transmuted back into dream?

The gods do indeed return in the third act of *Kagerō-za*, replete with theatrical icons of the divine. Japanese *kami*, the *yuki onna* (snow witch), *kitsune*, *obake*, and, most importantly, the *deus ex machina*—an essential element to kabuki performance—all make an appearance in the theatre performance.<sup>57</sup> The first part of

<sup>55</sup> Goodman, *Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s: The Return of the Gods* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1988), pp. 12-19.

<sup>56</sup> Goodman in Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, p. 259.

<sup>57</sup> Ortolani, *The Japanese Theatre*, p. 181.

the performance is a kabuki, and yet the children are wearing *bunraku* masks, a perfect example of the hybrid aesthetic. In this third act, the operative tradition is *bunraku*. However, it is Shinako who now appears on stage as a live puppet manipulated by a *kurogo* (puppeteer) in a red mask whose voice identifies her as the *deus ex machina*. Since the *kurogo* is usually clothed in black, the red colour of the puppeteer's mask associates her with violence, as in all Suzuki's colour films, but also with passion: Matsuzaki's fanciful sex scene with Shinako involves a red thread proceeding from his crotch, another traditional icon of desire.

Various wild events then occur before Matsuzaki's eyes. Most notably, the ghostly character of Ine (the first Mrs. Tamawaki) appears above the stage, connected to a transom, and flies out into the audience towards Matsuzaki. This is the technique of *chunori*, one of the great *keren* (or theatrical techniques) of kabuki, and one largely reserved for the appearance of supernatural beings. This is an important gesture in many ways. There is no attempt to hide the stage mechanism of the transom, so that Ine's flight would seem supernatural within the film's diegesis; on the contrary, the mechanism is excessively transparent. When cinema possesses so many technologies of illusion, Suzuki prefers, self-consciously, the artifice of stage technique.

The representation of *chunori* is accomplished in three shots:



9:23 Cinematic *Keren*, Shot (1): backwards track from a Long Shot of the stage as Ine descends on a transom towards Matsuzaki in the audience



9:24 Cinematic *Keren*, Shot (2): close section of Ine's upper body as she passes over Matsuzaki. *However*, in this shot Ine is no longer in motion, but stationary



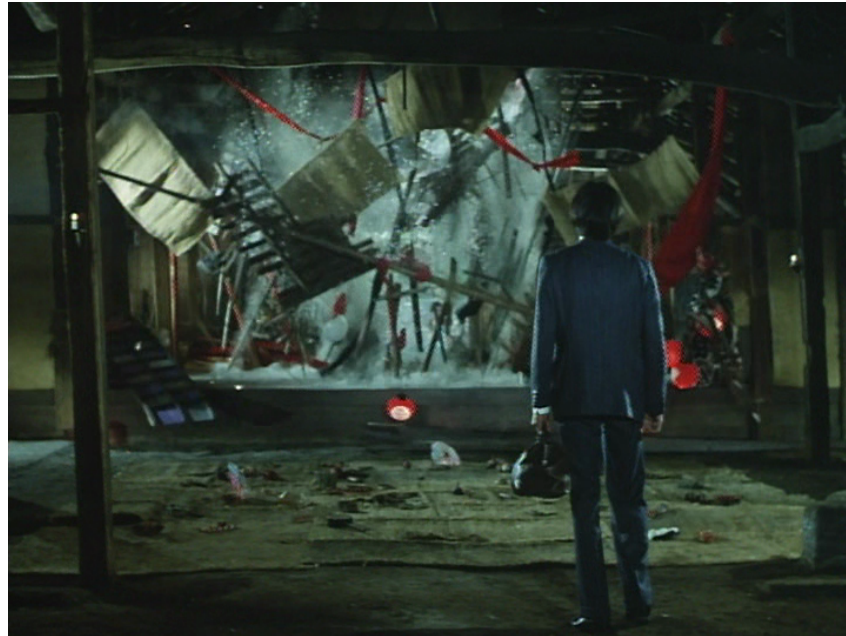
9:25 Cinematic *Keren*, Shot (3): a continuation of Shot (1): Ine is still in motion (i.e. she has never stopped)

The stage artifice of *chunori* is overlaid with blatant cinematic artificiality. Cinema transcends and expands upon the theatrical experience, but not in the direction of verisimilitude: quite the opposite. The second shot of Ine is remarkable in its dual capacity as frozen time and as false time (i.e. discontinuity). It is cinema's ability to transform time and space that is upheld, and yet can *only* be upheld through the abandonment of the sacred cows of realism and continuity. Small wonder that Suzuki has Tamawaki look directly into the camera and laugh, 'Who's talking about realism here?' The anti-realist spectacle of Ine's flight from the stage is an iconic image of Suzuki's cinematic project; if one were to choose a pair of shots (that is, a single cut) to represent The Suzuki Difference, this would do nicely.

In this third act, the distance between audience and performance breaks down to such an extent that the performance literally annihilates itself. After having been apparently possessed by her demonic puppeteer, Shinako straightens her posture as if she has been freed; but a mysterious dissolve follows, after which Shinako is still standing in roughly the same position. But something has occurred nevertheless;



Shinako abruptly turns around and runs straight through the theatre backdrop; her exit pulls down the backdrop and then, spectacularly, the entire stage.



9:26 Backdrop: Shinako (extreme background, right of centre) willfully brings down the makeshift theatre

Suzuki portrays the woman, in classical theatre, as a manipulated object; but Shinako escapes in a spectacular negation. The discourse on gender and cultural tradition is not quite ended, though. Behind the theatre, Shinako lowers herself into a tub of water, seemingly intent on drowning. As she does so, thousands of bladder cherries emerge from under her skirt to cover the surface of the water.<sup>58</sup> Matsuzaki attempts to follow Shinako into the tub, but he is held back by the invisible powers of the *deus ex machina*, now revealed as a female witch or deity who formerly appeared in the film as an old seller of bladder cherries. She explains to Matsuzaki, ‘I do not crave men’s souls.’ It is only Shinako’s death that the deity demands; the man’s death

<sup>58</sup> Bladder cherries (*hōzuki*) were both funereal symbols and, allegedly, crude forms of contraception in pre-modern Japan.

is irrelevant. Nevertheless, Matsuzaki fights her power and plunges his head into the pool, seemingly committing suicide and ending the third part of the film

*Sacrifice, Shamanism, and Female Gods*

What is this powerful, archaic deity that governs the theatre, and is both hostile and not hostile to women? This malicious force is gendered as female seemingly in order to clarify that the mythic structure revealed here is not the patriarchy represented by the capitalist Tamawaki. Tamawaki had urged Matsuzaki to commit suicide with his unfaithful wife; but the deity is not interested in love suicide, only in female sacrifice.

The great ‘poet’ of the love suicide was, and is, Chikamatsu, who typically presented a narrative of a merchant class hero torn between a wife and a mistress. The protagonist resorts to suicide because of the pressures of society. At risk of oversimplifying Chikamatsu, we may interpret that the love suicide, while it declares the lovers’ anti-social emotions (*ninjō*), is also an indirect means by which patriarchy attempts to control what it, by definition, cannot control: adultery. For instance, in *Yari no Gonza/Gonza the Spearman*, later filmed by Suzuki’s intimate, Shinoda (Shōchiku 1986), a husband is unwillingly pressured by society into killing his wife and her lover.

But matters are still more complicated in *Kagerō-za* by its historical context. The motives of Shinako and Matsuzaki are subtly differentiated from those of Chikamatsu’s heroes. As Matsuzaki points out, he and Shinako are strangers with nothing to bind them together but erotic attraction. It is therefore due to the ‘transcendental’ imagination of Meiji/Taishō culture, as filtered through the idiosyncratic works of Izumi Kyōka, that they conceive of an irrational desire to commit suicide together.



Charles Shirō Inouye comments that in Kyōka's Meiji-era stories, '...women are objects of sacrifice...tempting yet nurturing, they are pitifully oppressed while being divinely powerful. Kyōka's sympathy is with them...But it is undeniable that...[his] inner peace is predicated on [their]..unimaginable suffering.'<sup>59</sup> Suzuki's film reflects this sinister implication: whereas in the kabuki ghost story, the female ghost avenges her own murder, Ine's grudge is nothing more nor less than unrequited love for the monstrous Tamawaki. It is typical of Suzuki to insist on what no audience would like to accept, i.e. the profoundly amoral irrationality, even injustice, of attraction.

And yet Suzuki intervenes in Kyōka's sexual politics—which were highly progressive for their time<sup>60</sup>—through the heroism of Shinako. She instructs Matsuzaki that 'a woman is not so weak as you think,' and this dialogue is repeated by the female *deus ex machina*. Unlike Ine who remains jealous beyond the grave, Shinako alone is immune to the allure of masculine power (Tamawaki). Her 'affair' with Matsuzaki begins as deliberate provocation, an act of resistance. And yet, like an 'object of sacrifice' in Kyōka's original, Shinako must die for defying the social order, hence her (apparent) desire to draw Matsuzaki into a lover's suicide.

What cultural inheritance has motivated Shinako towards suicide rather than survival? Two conceptual readings are possible, both of which are intimately tied to the sacred origins of Japanese theatre, the form through which Suzuki has presented his argument.<sup>61</sup> The first concept is sacrifice, and on this reading of the film, the notion of sacrifice goes deeper than the social mechanisms of patriarchy, returning to

<sup>59</sup>Inouye, 'Afterward' to Izumi Kyōka, *Japanese Gothic Tales* (Univ. of Hawaii, 1996), p. 166.

<sup>60</sup>This included advocacy of women's rights and an anti-marriage and anti-war stance: Inouye, 'Afterward', p. 166.

<sup>61</sup>In both the film and Kyōka's original story, the theatrical performance takes place in the context of a *matsuri* (community festival), which was the principal sacred ceremony of the late pre-historic Yamato kingdom which became Japan's first imperial polity. Officiating over the *matsuri* was a principal duty of a male 'king' or chieftain of an *uji* or tribal unit, thus re-emphasising the interrelation of early patriarchal formations and religious practice. Joseph M. Kitagawa, 'Preface' to Donald L. Philippi, trans., *Norito, A Translation of Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), p. xxii.

its sacral origins as the slaughter of a beautiful object as an offering to the deity for the protection of the community. And yet, is it possible to read the concept of sacrifice in the history of Japan, whether as ritual or as myth, as categorically and functionally distinct from patriarchy?

The second essential concept is that of shamanism. Benito Ortolani grounds the origins of Japanese theatre in sacred rituals surrounding shamanism, a practise which penetrates further back into Japanese pre-history than the patriarchal *uji*, to a period in which the female shamans were, in fact, the possessors of political power.<sup>62</sup> A prominent type of female shaman was the medium who negotiated between the 'other realm' of the spirit and the world of men (as in Kurosawa's *Rashōmon*). Hori has also argued that, like sacrifice, shamans become particularly important in times of local crisis.

Ortolani emphasises the theatricality of the female shaman's divine ecstasy: 'The encounter of shamaness [and] *kami* happens...in the middle of theatrically suggestive, sometimes comical or erotic actions. When angry, vengeful powers are concerned, it may occur during terrifying high points of the rhythmic dances.'<sup>63</sup> The female shaman entertains divine guests, some of them distinctly unkind.<sup>64</sup> Shinako's 'fatal' dance also involves a radical transformation of body and spirit leading to the return of the gods.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Hori Ichirō, 'Shamanism in Japan,' *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 2:4 (Dec. 1975), pp. 235-236.

<sup>63</sup> in Samuel L. Leiter and James Brandon, eds., *Japanese Theater in the World* (New York: Japan Society, 1997), p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Although Suzuki's film makes at least a visual distinction between the ghostly Oine as a spirit and the female *kami* in the form of the old witch, it should be pointed out that Oine was originally German, and that strangers, especially foreigners, were often treated as *kami* (deities) in archaic Japanese folk tradition: such strangers could bring great luck and beneficence to the locals, or exactly the opposite: Yoshida Teigo, 'The Stranger as God,' *Ethnology* 20:2 (April 1981), pp. 87-99.

<sup>65</sup> On this major motif of female bodily transformation in the Japanese cinema and animation of the 1980s and 1990s, Susan Napier has argued that *hentai* (erotic) anime emphasises the 'female body in a frenzy of metamorphosis' that is not simply a portrait of 'submission and abjection' but an 'intricate series of contesting hierarchical relations' that 'suggests new kinds of power': Napier, 'The Frenzy of Metamorphosis: The Body in Japanese Pornographic Animation,' in Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh, eds., *Word and the Image in Japanese Cinema* (CUP, 2000), p. 361.

Scholarly accounts of Japanese shamanism conspicuously lack any reference to the death of the shaman. This complicates our reading of *Kagerō-za*, which must be understood in the complex cultural nexus that relates shamanism/magical transformation to sacrifice, which is not essentially patriarchal, but often suborned to it. What seems clear is that Shinako has carried out an active resistance to patriarchy through adultery, but in the process has channelled, Faust-like, an archaic female deity. Although this deity is explicitly not patriarchal, she seems to demand a price for social resistance. The significance of the female-as-shaman seems to ensure that women, and not men, have the power to effect or prevent fundamental change. In Imamura's contemporary *Narayama bushikō/Ballad of Narayama* (1983), a rural matriarch engineers the death of a misbehaving and adulterous young woman. Is such an act done in the virtual *imago* of patriarchy—hence the female perpetrator is the object of greater wrath—or purely in service of a coercive, transgendered communal order based inherently on false promises? Although *Kagerō-za* may speak of humanity's fundamental entrapment in a hostile universe, we also return, in the end, to a social reality that Suzuki has emphasised in the past: the cost of resistance is high, in fact, fatal. In a modern era where even the powerful shamaness is subject to male authority, how can feminine rebellion manifest itself? In the world of *Kagerō-za*, female resistance turns back upon itself in the form of the love suicide, for even in rebellion, how can one escape the closed interpretive circle of a dominant ideology? Yamane Sadao is correct to write that 'to watch *Kagerō-za* is to be bewitched by a dangerous beauty'; in other words, to be seduced into a trap. In the end, what has killed Shinako (and Matsuzaki?) is transcendental thinking—that which welded religious belief to an existing social structure even in marginal communities, from pre-historic Yamato up to the Pacific War.

#### IV. CRYSTALLINE IMAGES: THE EVOLUTION OF CINEMATIC DREAM AND SUBJECTIVITY

##### *The Crystalline Images of Deleuze*

Deleuze's concept of the crystal sign (*hyalosign*), a particular *specie* of the time-image of the modern (post-war) cinema, considers the indiscernibility of the real and imaginary. An analogous idea, grounded in Suzuki's own historical and intellectual context, may be considered a governing principle of his Taishō Trilogy, in which the diegetic and temporal status of the image is constantly called into question. In these films Suzuki builds on the surrealist models that influenced the Japanese avant-garde (Chapter Eight) in order to achieve a complex representation of cinematic time. Deleuze's *hyalosigns* allow us to appreciate the significance of this as they entail the evolution of dream-images and memory-images in modern cinema. For Deleuze, flashbacks and dream sequences were still integrated into continuity and linked to the sensory-motor-schema of classical cinema. Crystal signs are an evolution of this because they mark out a narrative cinema wherein the real and imaginary are confused. More precisely, there is a 'perpetual exchange' of real/imaginary in which the status of any given point is in question. For Deleuze, this indiscernibility results from a modern cinematic form which finally recognizes the complex temporal relations that govern everyday perception. In order for humans to be able to recognize and assign value to the objects that they perceive in the ever-flowing present, memory must be actualised at each present moment, so that the past in the form of memory (which is imaginary or virtual) and the present (which is actual, but unrecognizable without recourse to the virtual) coexist.<sup>66</sup> One could argue that Suzuki anticipated this in his 'butterfly' sequence of *Koroshi no rakuin*, in which the viewer becomes unable to distinguish between Hanada's reality and mentality,

<sup>66</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 117-124.

between diegetic and non-diegetic, linear time and circular time. It is crucial that the feverish Hanada, in this scene, cannot register or *remember* events properly, and this is what calls up a realm of fantastic and abstract imagery. When we engage in ‘attentive recognition,’ an attempt to understand or describe what we perceive, the past in the form of recollection becomes a decisive factor in our effort.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, however, if we *cannot* remember—if our act of recognition is not successful—this opens the doors to a realm of virtuality: ‘The actual image...does not link up....It rather enters into a relation with genuinely virtual elements, feelings of *déjà vu*...dream images....fantasies or theatre scenes.’<sup>68</sup>

In *Zigeunerweisen*, the impossibility of a simple ‘actuality’ image is presented in analogous terms. In the scene of haunting described above, Sono is crouching in one part of the room with Aochi behind her (Figure 9:8). Suddenly, there is an abrupt cut and Sono is now standing half-naked in a different part of the room, striking a spirited pose as if she, like a female shaman, were about to begin a dance (Figure 9.9). We cut to Aochi perceiving this, himself crouched in a different part of the room. This image fulfils what Deleuze calls the ‘absolute reversibility’ of the actual and the virtual, the real and the imagined. Because of the discontinuity and the presence of Aochi as perceiver, we are tempted to see the image as his fantasy; however, in Suzuki’s chronically discontinuous *mise-en-scène*, there is no criteria by which to mark this image as somehow ‘less actual’ than its surrounding images. Each successive image, no matter how strange, is equally actual and virtual, believable (in terms of the film) and unbelievable.

*Kagerō-za* also operates on the basis of such ‘crystalline’ images. The three ghostly appearances of Ine before the eyes of Matsuzaki may be fantasies, hauntings,

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 44, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 54-55.

or stagings; but they are crystal signs by virtue of the fact that none of these explanations—these attempts to code and delimit the image—are satisfying; each appearance is really none of these things, but purely indiscernible.

The final ten minutes of *Kagerō-za* presents a more complex example of Deleuze's crystal signs in the form of a reflexive manifesto on the necessity of a dream-like (crystalline) cinema. This begins with an abrupt cut after Matsuzaki has plunged his head into the tub of water, seemingly committing suicide with Shinako. But the scene soon changes to Matsuzaki on a moving train, propositioning a pretty girl. Outside of the train windows, however, instead of scenery, are sections of obscene paintings.



9:27 In the Realm of the Virtual: obscenely violent paintings replace the backdrops for a scene on a moving train

We cut to Matsuzaki standing alone on a Kanazawa street with another obscene painting in the background. In two discontinuous shots, Matsuzaki appears in front of the mural holding a decorative item, which turns out to be a spyglass.



9:28 Imaginary Signifier: Matsuzaki on the 'street' views different scenes and locations through a spyglass

As he looks through it towards the camera, there is a cut to another scene: Matsuzaki and Madame Mio are speaking in what resembles her Tokyo house, except that the *shōji* are now covered in obscene paintings. These paintings depict horrific gendered violence in the Edo-period style of woodblock prints and illustrations, thus signifying a tradition of such violence in art. Mio claims that Shinako died not with Matsuzaki, but her husband Tamawaki: suicide or murder? Matsuzaki responds by reciting a verse taken from the *Kyōka* story: 'Since I saw my lover in a dream, I have depended on dreams.' Mio opens the letter that was sent to her to find exactly this verse, written by Shinako.

There is an abrupt cut to a scene between Matsuzaki and the anarchist and then a return to Matsuzaki in the street, gazing through his spyglass. The next shot, from his POV, is a zoom through the open doorway of a house:



9:29 The (Virtual) Realm of the Dead: Shinako and other casualties of society appear in a ruined house from Matsuzaki's POV

Shinako enters, crossing in front of Ine who stands motionless. Two close-ups of Shinako follow, one a profile, the other a frontal angle. The next shot is of Shinako sitting in the background right, in front of the painted walls and on a painted platform. In the foreground is Matsuzaki, watching this scene with his back to the camera. A second Matsuzaki emerges from this first, immobile Matsuzaki.



9:30 The Double as Death: Matsuzaki (from the street) watches himself watching his double as the latter joins Shinako in an erotic/deathly union



The doubles turn to each other and bow; then the second sits with his back to Shinako. This ability to ‘see oneself’ is a form of death, according to the anarchist who told just this sort of story to Matsuzaki earlier. The last shot of the film is a close-up of Matsuzaki sitting in this position and facing the camera as he discusses his death in the future tense.

In this remarkable sequence, the painted walls and surfaces convey an artifice which mediates the horrific events they represent, removing them from an (unstable) diegesis and towards the realm of abstract expression. On one level, this sequence is about the act of artistic creation, particularly in a non-diegetic form. Matsuzaki is a playwright after all. But also, the sequence foregrounds perception, particularly the ‘arranged’ perception of the film director and his camera. Matsuzaki is not only the perceiver of these events; shots of his gazing through the spyglass frame or initiate the other scenes that occur, as if he is a director filming what he has choreographed.

This is perfectly in accord with the double nature (actual and virtual) of perception which Deleuze discussed as the foundation of the crystal image. The scenes that he ‘views’ (the conversation with Mio, for instance) may indeed have happened, but they are recollected/reimagined/recreated in the virtual form of a purely cinematic expression; hence the presence of a ‘lens’.

It is a mistake to think of these scenes as occurring in a present tense, at least in any superficial sense of the present, as if Matsuzaki and his lens were passively recording, like a documentary, some given reality as it happened before his eyes. Rather, since Matsuzaki is perceiving scenes involving himself, the scenes must in some sense be recollections. Madame Mio’s story also recounts past events, but those which took place after the third act of the film: i.e. in some sense in Matsuzaki’s ‘future.’



9:31 Whither the Present? Shot (1) Matsuzaki on a Kanazawa street viewing another scene from his spyglass



9:32 Whither the Present? Shot (2): what Matsuzaki is viewing: himself in Tokyo discussing what happened in his future *after* he left Kanazawa

There are spatial shifts from one scene to the next: Tokyo (Mio), then Kanazawa (the anarchist), with Matsuzaki perceiving all these things from the Kanazawa street near to the theatre where he *appeared* to have drowned in the third act. The past, which is always virtual, is simultaneously actualised with the presumed ‘present’ of Matsuzaki’s act of perception; the ‘virtual’ future is also actualised at that moment,

either as expectation or fantasy that may never become actual, or as an actual future which has not happened yet, in which case Matsuzaki's 'knowing' present is impossible: the present therefore 'disappears'.

The most we can say about this temporally indiscernible sequence, therefore, is that Matsuzaki is in the act of recording, reviewing, or recreating either something that happened (memory), or something in his mind, in order to represent it artistically. The scenes, then, must be memories represented in the form of fantasy or pure artistic expression; or, they may be fantasies cast in the form of fictitious recollections. Suzuki's independent creation of a 'crystalline cinema' denies any means by which to judge.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### *Death Twenty-Four Frames Per Second*<sup>69</sup>

I shall conclude this chapter and thesis with two considerations: first, I link the ideological argument of the Taishō trilogy to the consequences of Deleuzian indiscernibility. Second, I revisit the Late Suzuki's characteristic strategy of 'doubling' as a way of re-envisioning his authorial signature.

Why does Matsuzaki end up apparently committing suicide with a woman he barely knows? *Zigeunerweisen*'s portrait of uneasy cultural transition and *Kagerō-za*'s portrait of double suicide as a romantic return to the symbolic order of a mythic past can be likened to the themes of post-war European cinema. John Orr argues that in Antonioni's influential films the crisis of modernity 'lies in its failure to create new values which match the progress in technology we use in everyday life....If there is

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<sup>69</sup> The title is a reference to Laura Mulvey's 2006 work *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion), which similarly explores connections between spectatorial investments of desire in cinema and 'the representations of time that can be discovered in the relation between movement and stillness in the cinema' (p.7).

little to replace absolute value in the modern world, desire does not replace love. Yet already love is a conception which belongs to the past.<sup>70</sup> Matsuzaki's double suicide, as a Japanese form of 'absolutism of the spirit' or an iteration of 'transcendental' values, is analogous to the European tradition of 'romantic love.' It both represents and distorts an increasingly archaic past. Yet Taishō democracy and consumerism put nothing in place of nostalgia for that past. The now-capitalist patriarchy offers only a hypocritical continuity based on the commodification of tradition. Apart from negating this, Suzuki's only answer to the crisis of values is to revisit the past in the pleasurable form of art pastiche; but he well knows that Japan's answer, in the Shōwa period, was militarism.

Through his romantic suicide (real or imagined) Matsuzaki goes through an inverse variation of the pre-war past, and also, perhaps, an inverse of the trajectory of Tetsu in *Tokyo nagaremono*. Both characters wish for an impossible return to the past because stymied by ill-fitness to the environment around them; Tetsu 'lets himself go' through a tirade of savage violence in order to repair his relationship to Tokyo, to feel at home in this spatial environment. Matsuzaki goes through the inverse—suicide, perhaps, or else a *zen*-like 'blowout' or extinction of the mind—in order to have a *rapprochement* with time, rather than space. While *Tokyo nagaremono* ironically revises studio genre material, Matsuzaki's 'melt down' represents the quintessential *nouvelle vague* and *nuberu bagu* protagonist, from Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965) to Cammell and Roeg's *Performance* (1968), from Masumura's *Kyōjin to gangu/Giants and Toys* (Daiei 1958) through Shinoda's *Shinjū: Ten no amijima/Double Suicide* (ATG 1969) to the destructive sexual epiphanies of Ōshima's *Ai no korida* (a film

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<sup>70</sup> Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*, pp. 7,9.

which Suzuki claimed should be seen by the whole world) and the avant-garde wing of the *pinku eiga*.

Yet the indiscernibility of the ‘real’ in cinema profoundly affects this question. Does it matter whether Matsuzaki has ‘actually’ committed suicide, or is actuality less important than the fact that Matsuzaki’s beliefs and desires lead him to romanticize this backward-looking act? I would argue that the distinction between actuality/agency and mere expression matters a great deal to Suzuki. He posits it as necessary, even desirable, to call forth even our most dangerous desires in the act of cinema viewing. For Suzuki, this ‘desiring’ in the safety of the cinema is akin to dreaming, and the last thing this director wants is the policing of dreams. For Suzuki, the problem begins when society institutionalises such desire as a symbolic order; hence the necessity of a counter-institutional cinema.

Viewed in this light, Matsuzaki’s ‘artistic experience’ of love suicide may be perfectly commendable: indeed he is much happier in the denouement than in the ‘real world’ where Tamawaki has institutionalised such desires in the service of patriarchy. Matsuzaki critiques the magical theatre performance, which retells the story of Tamawaki’s crimes, by saying, ironically, that he does not go in for ‘realism’. Similarly, when fantasies of violence and subjugation appear in genre cinema as an industrial mandate, they create a false (ideological) image of reality; but Suzuki’s non-diegetic cinema artifice justifies itself as an acceptable, indeed necessary space within which to relive our abject desire. The ‘Suzuki difference,’ then, appears as an ethical imperative: as Deleuze concluded independently, it is necessary to be ‘false,’ to be ‘impertinent.’

*Coda: The Alternate Suzukis*

These conclusions, I argue, hold true for nearly all of the cinematic encounters between Suzuki's authorial modernism and the Japanese historical imaginary. We should, however, be cautious of too unitary a reading of a long, unpredictable career. The director's own insistence on an open, evasive signification—and on the 'doubleness' of all our mental and cinematic reckonings of reality—necessitates that there can be no one Suzuki Seijun the author, just as there is no one reading of his films, ideological or otherwise. The diversity of approaches that I have taken in this thesis has already revealed—or perhaps *created*, if we grant that function to criticism—a certain duality to Suzuki's aesthetic, i.e. two related readings that are subtly alternate. I shall therefore, as something of an epilogue, consider a Suzuki who is distinct from the one I have presented heretofore in this chapter: a one invoked in my discussion of his most nihilist films, such as *Koroshi no rakuin*. But it is particularly in Suzuki's most reviled film, *Hishū monogatari* (1977), his 'unsuccessful' comeback to the Japanese cinema, that this divergent reading seems to come to the fore.

*Hishū* is a disgusted satire of post-war modernity—and television in particular—that proved to be savage beyond the bounds of popular and critical taste. A textile corporation starts with image of luxury golfing clothes for women, then proceeds to mould an actual woman—the hardworking young golfer Reiko (Shiraki Yoko)—to fit that image. Having her play golf in a bikini for the camera is only the beginning. A modern youth with no direction other than to grab at celebrity, Reiko at first cooperates with the corporate patriarchs in her own commodification. Her professionalism and craftsmanship elevate her above a degrading context. But later, as she becomes a celebrity on TV—on which every show devolves into a beauty

contest—she almost wilfully begins to suffer at the hands of the viewers and ‘fans.’ Once again, for Suzuki, it is punishment that not only demarcates, but truly creates, the individual. At last, in a final bid to squash her self-confidence and bring her back down to the level of the group, the viewers subject her to violation and, then, prostitution. Only then is she ‘fit’ to be sacrificed. What begins as corporate manipulation expands to discover the deep pathology of the ‘ordinary’, to which the corporations offer up celebrities as a sacrifice and distraction. Reiko is no hero like the 47 *rōnin*—this is a quotidian universe devoid of ideal types—but, for Suzuki, she is unquestionably a martyr who is suited to her times.



9.33 Suzuki's Homage to Dreyer: Reiko as Joan of Arc

This is why the viewers must bring Reiko ‘down to their level’, for in an age of televisual narcissism, why should our martyrs/victims be any different than ourselves?

The all-consuming, Moloch-like nihilism of *Hishū* suggests that there are two Suzukis, just as there are two Kurosawas, the maker of *jidai-geki* period films and *gendai-geki* (modern) social dramas. But for Suzuki, the ‘period film’ is not defined by narrative setting—which might as well be contemporary—but by an aesthetic

frame of reference to a pre-modern world view. In the Taishō and *yakuza* films, *Nikutai no mon* and *Opereta tanuki goten*, this historical imaginary functions as the site of masochistic play and abject spectacle that exorcises our demons. The ‘Second Suzuki’ is the maker of devastating social satires: *Hishū*, *Koroshi no rakuin*, *Shunpuden*, *Kawachi Karumen* (despite its survivalist ending). Both types of films utilise a reflexive and negative aesthetic: the difference between them is perhaps the difference that Deleuze proposed between negativity as disavowal and negativity as destruction. Disavowal, in the ‘period films,’ creates a dreamlike alternate reality in which the cruelty of history and our conditioned, cruel desires can be refashioned, so as to leave the spectator in a position that is, ideally, both honest and bearable. But the satirical films, like Honda Ishirō’s *Gojira* (1954), obliterate everything in their path, including, symbolically, the viewer. Rejection predominates: are our desires ultimately as irredeemable as the society that exploits and suppresses them? The question of which mode is more trenchant is undoubtedly relative to the viewer’s historical situation and intellectual context.

Finally, there are, of course, other readings of Suzuki that I have not emphasised for reasons of space and argumentative focus. Some might wish to emphasise his skills as a narrative artist more than I have done: for this thesis has consistently poised Suzuki as the antagonist of (conventional) cinematic narration. To be sure, Suzuki’s films (except *Yumeji*) are not free associative collages. Created within a popular idiom, they depend on narrative, broadly speaking, or at least the tension between narrative and other structures, as a source of pleasure and stimulation. However, this thesis has proposed a set of readings of Suzuki related to a central core of the operations of negativity and the recognition of difference. When we encounter Gaudi’s Sagrada Família Cathedral in Barcelona, we must first account for its



extraordinary material and conceptual difference to all Christian architecture before or since. Should we choose to later dwell on the Augustinian piety that informed Gaudi's world-view and has much to do with Catholic tradition, this in no way diminishes the fact and significance of the Sagrada Cathedral's extraordinary difference.

'Augustinian piety,' to give but one example, does not explain the great influence of Gaudi's work on the Spanish surrealists. From out of the edifice of tradition, Gaudi carved the unique. What I have done here, in the case of Suzuki, is to account for a similarly irreducible difference: for that is ultimately his contribution to the history of the cinema. Compared to Lubitsch or Renoir, Ozu or Kurosawa, films like *Tokyo nagaremono* and *Kagerō-za* are hardly triumphs of narrative art. Rather, they are triumphs of an art that is narrative *among other things*. The formal and conceptual motifs that I have investigated in these chapters, such as discontinuity, iconicity, theatricality, the fantasy scenarios of masochism, and the open-ended, non-diegetic gesture, all contributed to a revisionist cinema of spectacle that had to be divorced from the narrative and indexical assumptions of the classical cinema in order re-establish an authorial and ethical autonomy.

In their manner of critically redressing the post-war balance of spectacle and narrative, the films of Suzuki hold a value to film history that is close to unique. As a cultural influence, moreover, he has a central place, along with manga, in the evolution of Japanese cinema from narrative-as-continuity to narrative as successive iconographical units.<sup>71</sup> The current reign of television anime (to which Suzuki also

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<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that the screenwriter of Suzuki's *Pisutoru opera* (2001), Itō Kazunori, is the most influential and celebrated writer of Japanese animated films to date, with such credits as the *Kōkaku Kidōtai/Ghost in the Shell* (1995-), *Patlabor* (1989-) and *Urei yatsura* (1983-1991) film series to his name. He discusses the influence of *Koroshi no rakuin* in Akahori Masako and Tanabe Kaori, eds., *Style to kill: Koroshi no rakuin visual directory* (Tokyo: Puchigura paburissingu, 2001), pp. A30-A34. This is not to imply that Itō's work, any more than Suzuki's, is directly responsible for, or ideologically and aesthetically complicit in, the negative aspects of the contemporary image crisis I discuss in this paragraph; it is simply another important stepping stone towards contemporary developments both positive and negative.

contributed), where a constant recycling of familiar visual, narrative, and mythological clichés replaces the need for a reality effect, seems to have fulfilled this evolution only to create another crisis of the image—an endless cycle of ‘ironic’ repurposing and then emotional reinvestment in hollow cliché. This, perhaps, should be a point of departure for a further, and reoriented, investigation into Suzuki’s place in the history of film and media cultures.

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***Kyonetsu no kisetsu/Season of the Sun aka Season of Heat aka The Warped Ones***. Dir. Kurahara Koreyoshi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1960. Main cast: Kawachi Tamio, Matsumoto Noriko, Nagato Hiroyuki, Gō Eiji.

***The Maltese Falcon***. Dir. John Huston. Prod. Warner Brothers. USA, 1941. Main cast: Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, Sydney Greenstreet.

***Miyamoto Musashi dai-ichi-bu/Musashi Miyamoto Part One***. Dir. Inagaki Hiroshi. Prod. Tōhō. Japan, 1940. Main cast: Kataoka Chiezo, Hara Kensaku, Miyagi Chikako, Kawaga Ryōsuke.

***Jigoku/Inferno***. Dir. Nakagawa Nobuo. Prod. Kokusai Hoei/Shintōhō (distrib.). Japan 1960. Main cast: Amachi Shigeru, Mitsuya Utako, Numata Yoichi, Nakamura Torahiko.

***The Long Goodbye***. Dir. Robert Altman. Prod. E-K Corporation/Lion's Gate Films. USA, 1973. Main cast: Elliot Gould, Nina van Pallandt, Sterling Hayden, Mark Rydell.

***Metropolis***. Dir. Fritz Lang. Prod: UFA. Germany, 1927. Main cast: Brigitte Helm, Gustav Frölich, Rudolph Klein-Rogge, Alfred Abel.

***Murder by Contract***. Dir. Irving Lerner. Prod. Orbit Films/Columbia. USA, 1958. Main cast: Vince Edwards, Herschel Bernardi.

***Nagaremono*** (film series). Dir. Yamazaki Tokujiro. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1960-61. Main cast: Kobayashi Akira, Shishido Jō, Asaoka Ruriko.

***Naniwa erejii/Naniwa Elegy*** aka *Osaka Elegy*. Dir. Mizoguchi Kenji. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1936. Main cast: Yamada Isuzu, Umemura Yōko, Asaka Shinhachirō, Shiganoya Benkei.

***Narayama bushikō/Ballad of Narayama***. Dir. Kinoshita Keisuke. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1958. Main cast: Tanaka Kinuyo, Takahashi Teiji, Miyaguchi Seiji, Itō Yūnosuke.

***Narayama bushikō/Ballad of Narayama***. Dir. Imamura Shōhei. Prod. Tōei. Japan, 1983. Main cast: Ogata Ken, Sakamoto Sumiko, Aki Takejō, Takada Junko.

***Nihon no yoru to kiri/Night and Fog in Japan***. Dir. Ōshima Nagisa. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1960. Main cast: Kuwano Miyuki, Watanabe Fumio, Tsugawa Masahiko.

***Night and the City***. Dir. Jules Dassin. Prod. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. UK, 1950. Main cast: Richard Widmark, Gene Tierney, Googie Withers, Francis L. Sullivan.

***Nikui an-chikushō/I Hate but Love***. Dir. Kurahara Koreyoshi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1962. Main cast: Ishihara Yūjirō, Asaoka Ruriko, Nagato Hiroyuki, Kawachi Tamio.

***Nikutai no mon/Gate of Flesh***. Dir. Makino Masahiro. Prod. Yoshimoto Production. Japan, 1948. Main cast: Aizome Yumiko, Haruna Kaoru, Kyokawa Sōji, Mizushima Michitarō.

***Nikutai no mon/Gate of Flesh***. Dir. Nishimura Shōgorō. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1977. Main cast: Kayama Reiko, Yamaguchi Miyako, Watanabe Tokuko, Miyashita Junko.

***Nippon konchūki/Insect Woman***. Dir. Imamura Shōhei. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1963. Main cast: Hidari Sachiko, Aizawa Keiko, Kawazu Seizaburō, Harukawa Masumi.

***Nora inu/Stray Dog***. Dir. Kurosawa Akira. Prod. Tōhō. Japan, 1949. Main cast: Mifune Toshirō, Shimura Takashi, Miyoshi Eiko, Awaji Keiko.

***Nora neko rokku: Sekkusu hantā/Stray Cat Rock: Sex Hunter***. Dir. Hasebe Yasuhara. Prod. Nikkatsu, 1970. Main cast: Kaji Meiko, Fuji Tatsuya, Okazaki Jirō.

***North by Northwest***. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod: M-G-M. Main cast: Cary Grant, Eve Marie Saint, James Mason, Jessie Royce Landis.

***Odds Against Tomorrow***. Dir. Robert Wise. Prod. United Artists. USA, 1957. Main cast: Harry Belafonte, Robert Ryan, Gloria Grahame, Shelley Winters.

***Okasareta haku/Violated Angels***. Dir. Wakamatsu Kōji. Prod. Wakamatsu Pro. Japan, 1967. Main cast: Kara Jūrō, Koyanagi Keiko, Natsu Junko.

***Onibaba***. Dir. Shindo Kaneto. Prod. Tōhō. Japan, 1964. Main cast: Otawa Nobuko, Yoshimura Jitsuko, Satō Kei, Uno Jukichi.

***Ore no kenjū wa subayai/My Pistol is Quick***. Dir. Noguchi Hiroshi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1954. Asst. Dir. Suzuki Seitarō. Main cast: Kawazu Seizaburō, Sumiko Hidaka, Nawa Hiroshi.

***Ore wa matteiru ze/I am Waiting*** Dir. Kurahara Koreyoshi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1957. Main cast: Ishihara Yūjirō, Kitihara Mie, Nitani Hideaki, Kosugi Isamu.

***Otoko no monshō/Gambler's Code***. Dir. Matsuo Akinori. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1966. Main cast: Takahashi Hideki, Izumi Masako, Kondō Hiroshi, Kijima Ichirō.

***La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc/The Passion of Joan of Arc***. Dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer. Prod. Société Générale des Films. France 1928. Main cast: Renée Falconetti, Eugene Silvain, Maurice Schutz, Antonin Artaud.

***Performance***. Dir. Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg. Prod. Warner Brothers. UK, 1968/70. Main cast: James Fox, Mick Jagger, Anita Pallenberg, Michele Brèton.

***Le Procès/The Trial***. Dir. Orson Welles. Prod. Paris/Europa Productions/Hisa Film/Finanziaria Cinematografica Italiana (FICIT). France, Germany, Italy, 1962. Main cast: Anthony Perkins, Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider, Orson Welles.

***Rakujitsu no kettō/Duel at Sunset***. Dir. Noguchi Hiroshi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Written by Suzuki Seitarō and Ida Motomu. Asst. Dir. Suzuki Seitarō. Japan, 1955. Main cast: Bando Kōtarō, Akechi Jūzaburō.

***Rear Window***. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. Universal. USA, 1954. Main cast: James Stewart, Grace Kelly, Thelma Ritter, Raymond Burr.

***Red River***. Dir. Howard Hawks. Prod. United Artists. USA, 1946/8. Main cast: John Wayne, Montgomery Clift, Walter Brennan, Joanne Dru.

***Sabita naifu/Rusty Knife***. Dir. Masuda Toshio. Japan, 1958. Main cast: Ishihara Yūjirō, Kitahara Mie, Kobayashi Akira, Shiraki Mari.

***Scarface***. Dir. Howard Hawks. Prod. Universal. USA, 1932. Main cast: Paul Muni, Ann Dvorak, George Raft, Boris Karloff.

***The Searchers***. Dir. John Ford. Prod. Warner Bros. USA, 1956. Main cast: John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, Natalie Wood, Ward Bond.

***Seidan botan-dōrō/Hellish Love***. Dir. Sone Chūsei. Japan, 1972. Main cast: Ogawa Setsuko, Hara Hidemi.

***Seishun zankoku monogatari/Cruel Story of Youth aka Naked Youth***. Dir. Ōshima Nagisa. Japan, 1960. Main cast: Kuwano Miyuki, Kawazu Yūsuke, Kuga Yoshiko, Watanabe Fumio.

***Shiiku/The Catch***. Dir. Ōshima Nagisa. Prod. Sōzōsha. Japan, 1961. Main cast: Mikuni Rentarō, Hugh Hurd.

***Shushin imada kiezuru/Red Lips Still Not Gone***. Dir. Shibuya Minoru. Prod. Shōchiku 1949. 3<sup>rd</sup>. Asst. Dir. Suzuki Seitarō. Main cast: Takasugi Sanae, Saburi Shin, Sada Keiji, Kuga Yoshiko.



***Stagecoach***. Dir. John Ford. Prod. Walter Wanger. USA, 1939. Main cast: John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Thomas Mitchell, John Carradine.

***Taiyō no hakaba/The Sun's Burial***. Dir. Ōshima Nagisa. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1960. Main cast: Honō Kayoko, Tsugawa Masahiko, Sasaki Isao, Fujiwara Kamitari.

***Taiyō no kisetsu/Season of the Sun***. Dir. Furukawa Takumi. Prod. Nikkatsu, 1956. Main cast: Nagato Hiroyuki, Minamida Yōko, Tsugawa Masahiko, Ishihara Yūjirō.

***Tanin no kao/Face of Another***. Dir. Teshigahara Hiroshi. Prod. Teshigahara Production. Japan, 1966. Main cast: Nakadai Tatsuya, Kyō Machiko, Hira Mikijirō, Kishida Kyōko.

***Tanuki goten/Raccoon Palace***. Dir. Kimura Keigo. Prod. Shinko Kinema Oizumi Ltd. Japan, 1939. Main cast: Azuma Ryōnosuke, Bando Tarō.

***Taxi Driver***. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Prod. Italo/Judeo Films/Bill-Phillips/Columbia Pictures. USA, 1976. Main cast: Robert De Niro, Jodie Foster, Harvey Keitel, Cybill Shepherd.

***Tirez sur la Pianiste/Shoot the Piano Player***. Dir. François Truffaut. Prod. Les Films de la Pléiade. France, 1962. Main cast: Charles Aznavour, Marie Dubois, Nicole Berger, Albert Rémy.

***Tobenai chinmoku/Silence Has No Wings***. Dir. Kazuki Kuroi. Prod. ATG. Japan, 1964/6. Main cast: Kaga Mariko.

***Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan/Yotsuya Ghost Story of Tokaidō***. Japan, 1959. Main cast: Amachi Shigeru, Kitazawa Noriko.

***Un Chien Andalou/An Andalusian Dog***. Dir. Dali and Buñuel. Prod. Charles de Noailles. France, 1929. Main cast: Pierre Batcheff, Simone Mareuil.

***Underworld***. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Prod. Paramount. USA, 1927. Main cast: George Bancroft, Clive Brook, Evelyn Brent.

***Urutora Q*** (TV series) Dir. Kajita Kōji, Tsuburaya Hajime, et al. Prod. Tsuburaya Production. Japan, 1965. Main cast: Sahara Kenji, Sakurai Hiroko, Nakajima Haruo.

***Wataridori*** (film series). Dir. Saitō Buichi, Ushihara Yoichi. Prod. Nikkatsu. Japan, 1959-1962. Main cast: Kobayashi Akira, Asaoka Ruriko, Shishido Jō.

***Yari no Gonza/Gonza the Spearman***. Dir. Shinoda Masahiro. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1986. Main cast: Iwashita Shima, Go Hiromi, Kawarazaki Chōichiro, Ōtaki Hideki.

***Yoidore tenshi/Drunken Angel***. Dir. Kurosawa Akira. Prod. Tōhō. Japan, 1948. Main cast: Shimura Takashi, Mifune Toshiro, Kogure Michiyo, Kuga Yoshiko.

***Yotsuya kaidan/Ghost Story of Yotsuya***. Dir. Kinoshita Keisuke. Prod. Shōchiku. Japan, 1949. Main cast: Tanaka Kinuyo, Uehara Ken, Sugimura Haruko, Sada Keji.

***Zigomar***. Dir. Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset. Prod. Société Française des Films Éclair. France 1911. Main cast: Charles Krauss, Alexandre Arquillière.

## APPENDIX

### COMPLETE FILMOGRAPHY FOR SUZUKI AS DIRECTOR

ABBREVIATIONS: Scr: writer; Pro: studio or production body (line producer given in parenthesis); M: musical composer or director; Ed: editor; Ph: director of photographer; Pd: Production Designer; O: other production staff

#### NOTA BENE:

\*Only theatrical releases are included in this filmography. Television and video productions are omitted. Japanese release dates are included at the end of credits.

\*Features listed here from 1956 to 1957 carried the directorial credit of 'Suzuki Seitarō.' Films from 1958-2005 were credited to the director's assumed name, Suzuki Seijun.

#### 1956

***Minato no kanpai: shōri wo wagate ni*** (勝利をわが手に港の乾杯) / *Harbour Toast: Victory is in Our Grasp* aka *Victory is Mine*

Cast: Mishima Kō, Maki Shinsuke, Minami Sumiko, Amaji Keiko, Sugai Ichirō, Sano Asao, Ashida Shinsuke. Scr: Nakagawa Norio, Urayama Kirio. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Ph: Fujioka Kumenobu. Ed: Kondō Mitsuo. Pd: Satani Teruyoshi. M: Hirakawa Hideo. O: Kurahara Koreyoshi (asst. dir.). Japan, 21.3.1956.

Plot: Pop song film. A tale of brotherly sacrifice. Shinkichi (Mishima), a former sailor, has trouble with his brother Jirō (Maki), an up and coming jockey. Jirō runs after the mysterious Asako (Minami) against Shinkichi's advice and gets into trouble with a shady figure who may be her pimp, Osawa (Ashida). Soon Osawa is blackmailing Jirō into taking a dive in a major race, but after much complication, Jirō rides to victory. Osawa beats up Jirō and tries to kill him; Shinkichi intercedes and Osawa is killed. Shinkichi asks Asako to look after his brother as the cops come to arrest him. He looks out on the ocean one last time.

***Umi no junjō*** (海の純情) / *Pure Emotions of the Sea* aka *Innocent Love at Sea*

Cast: Kasuga Hachirō, Kobayashi Jūshirō, Takada Toshie, Kō Tomoko, Akemi Kyōko. Scr: Norimasa Mayumi, Tanabe Tomomi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Mogi Ryōji). Ph Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Yagyū Kazuo. M: Eguchi Yoshi. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 7.6.1956.

Plot: Pop song Film. Handsome sailor Hachirō (singer Kasuga), on a whaling vessel headed for the Antarctic, is pursued by a geisha (Akemi) but loves the captain's gentle daughter Kazue (Takada). Meanwhile the captain (Kobayashi) is beset with problems of a poor catch and a fractious crew. Upon returning, Kazue spurns Hachirō over a misunderstanding. After an abortive suicide attempt, Hachirō finds himself falling for the shipping company boss' daughter Mitsuyo (Kō), but this arouses the jealousy of a higher-ranking shipmate who slanders Hachirō to the captain. The ship goes out once more, but Mitsuyo disguises herself as a sailor. The captain kills a whale but fractures his bone in the process; Hachirō takes over, successfully, as harpooner. On land again, Mitsuyo approaches Kazue and clears Hachirō's name so that he and Kazue can be together.

***Akuma no machi*** (悪魔の街)/*Demon Town* aka *Satan's Town*

Cast: Kawazu Seizaburō, Sugai Ichirō, Yumi Asuza, Ashida Shinsuke, Hisamatsu Akira;  
 Scr: Shiraishi Gorō (based on a novel by Matsumura Motoki (aka Shiki Ichirō). Pro:  
 Nikkatsu (Yanagawa Takeo); M: Kosugi Taichirō; Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue; Ed: Suzuki  
 Akira; Pd: Satani Sanbei. Japan, 12.7.1956.

Plot: Two convicts escape from prison, a *yakuza* boss (Sugai), and his cellmate (Kawazu), in reality an undercover cop. As the former re-involves himself in horse race fixing and other *yakuza* activities, a game of feint and double feint, suffused with questions of loyalty, is played out. Eventually, as the boss goes on a spree of violence, the undercover cop must protect a girl (Azusa) he is smitten with and helps the police apprehend the *yakuza* on a ferry.

**1957*****Ukikusa no yado*** (浮草の宿)/*Inn of the Floating Weeds* aka *Floating Inn*

Cast: Nitani Hideaki, Kasuga Hachirō, Kimuro Ikuko, Abe Tōru, Yamaoka Hisano. Pro:  
 Nikkatsu (Mogi Ryōji). Scr: Yamazaki Gan. M: Eguchi Yoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd:  
 Satani Teruyoshi. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 9.1.1957.

Plot: Pop song film. A young *yakuza* (Nitani) in Yokohama is manipulated by his boss (Abe) into killing a rival and going to prison for five years. Upon his return he finds that his girlfriend is the boss's mistress. While distracted by the sister (Yamaoka) of a crooner (Kasuga), the hero is eventually drawn into a shootout with his reckless boss.

***Hachi jikan no kyōfu***(8 時間の恐怖)/*Eight Hours of Horror*

Cast: Fukami Taizō, Misuzu Eiko, Kaneko Nobuo, Nitani Hideaki, Shima Keiko,  
 Nakahara Keishichi, Tone Harue, Uemura Kenjirō, Kondō Hiroshi, Hara Hisako,  
 Minami Sumiko. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Tanada Gorō, Tsukiji Rokurō. M:  
 Niki Takio. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Satani Sanbei. O: Takeda  
 Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 8.3.1957.

Plot: A storm and flood stops a train dead in its tracks for eight hours. The passengers try to leave by bus in the perilous weather, but a mother with a baby disappears in the process. The other passengers, including a student (Nitani), an executive and his wife (Fukami, Misuzu), an elderly couple, search for her. She is found but the baby has become ill in the storm. The train is then boarded by an ex-doctor (Kaneko) who is in fact an escaped murderer. He wants to reform, but the bus on its rural journey is also boarded by some *yakuza* thugs who have pulled a heist. They take the bus hostage, and the menaced passengers must find a way to survive. A teenage girl lures one gangster into the woods and into a bear trap; the other commandeers the bus only to run across a police truck. Trying to escape from the police, the gangster falls off a mountain road along with all the loot.

***Rajo to kenjū*** (裸女と拳銃)/*Nude Girl With a Gun* aka *The Nude and the Gun* aka *The Girl and the Gun*

Cast: Mizushima Michitarō, Shiraki Mari, Sugai Ichirō, Shishido Jō, Minami Sumiko, Nitani Hideaki. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Tanabe Tomomi (from a short story by Washio Saburō). M: Hara Rokurō. Ph: Matsunashi Umeo Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. O: O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 7.12.1957.

Plot: Newspaper crime photographer (Mizushima) follows an anonymous tip about drug smuggling to a seedy cabaret. As an erotic dancer (Shiraki) performs, a shot rings out. During the chaos of fleeing bodies, the photographer hooks up with the dancer and goes to her apartment. She steps out for cigarettes, and after waiting for an eternity, the hero finds he is locked in the room with a concealed corpse. The police lieutenant (Shishido) is inclined to believe the hero's innocence, and as he seeks to clear his name he meets a professional woman who is a dead ringer for the cabaret singer. Is she the same woman? His erotic obsession leads him further into the secretive smuggling operation of a crime lord (Sugai) who operates out of a Buddhist temple. After repeated attempts on his life, he ends up shanghaied on a ship with the mysterious girl, who is the kingpin's wily mistress. The police attack the boat; the mistress is killed in the ensuing escape, but it transpires that she has sabotaged the kingpin's escape boat, which blows up.

**1958**

***Ankokugai no bijo***(暗黒街の美女)/*Underworld Beauty*

Cast: Mizushima Michitarō, Shiraki Mari, Kondō Hiroshi, Abe Tōru, Takashina Kaku, Ashida Shinsuke. Pro: Nikkatsu (Nishihara Takashi). Scr: Saji Susumu. M: Yamamoto Naozumi. Ph: Nakao Watarō. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 25.3.1958.

Plot: Professional criminal Miyamoto (Mizushima) is released from jail and recovers stolen diamonds from his hiding place in the sewers. In order to help his ailing ex-partner Mihara (Ashida), Miyamoto arranges to sell the diamonds to the *yakuza* boss (Abe) for whom he took the rap five years ago. When the boss attempts to steal the diamonds, Mihara swallows them in desperation before falling to his death. The grieving Miyamoto attempts to look after Mihara's spunky sister Akiko (Shiraki), who rebuffs his advances. Akiko models nude for her callous boyfriend (Kondō), a perverted sculptor of store mannequins obsessed with human anatomy. The *yakuza* use the sculptor to stealthily extract the diamonds from the dead man's corpse. When Miyamoto finds out, he beats the craven sculptor, further alienating Akiko. When the gang arrives on the scene, Miyamoto hides the diamonds in the breast of the mannequin. A hunt for the right mannequin then ensues across the city, with Miyamoto one step ahead until the gang kidnaps Akiko and threatens to roast her in a steam bath. A complex gunfight in the basement of a beauty parlour ensues in which all the villains are killed. Miyamoto and Akiko are now potentially a couple, but does she really want the older man?

***Fumihazushita haru*** (踏みはずした春)/*The Spring That Never Came*

Cast: Sachiko Hidari, Kobayashi Akira, Asaoka Ruriko, Abe Tōru, Nitani Hideaki, Noro Keisuke, Shishido Jō, Tonoyama Taiji, Takashina Kaku, Hisamatsu Akira. Pro: Nikkatsu (Takagi Masayuki). Scr: Terada Nobuyoshi, Okada Tatsuto (based on a novel by

Fujiguchi Tōgo). M: Hayashi Hikari. Ph: Yamazaki Yoshihiro. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Japan, 29.6.1958.

Plot: A young worker from 'Big Brothers and Sisters,' an NGO that tries to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents, is attached to the case of a troubled teen Nobuo (Kobayashi) who wants to go straight. However she falls in love with him and is induced to go to drinking at a Jazz Hall and eventually to a love hotel. Subsequently, the vicious thugs surrounding the hero put her in danger. Further, a young girl (Asaoka) in love with Nobuo is preyed on by the gang, who drug her and try to rape her. A violent confrontation between Nobuo and his associates ensues.

***Aoi chibusa*** (青い乳房)/*Blue Breasts* aka *Young Breasts*

Cast: Watanabe Misako, Kobayashi Akira, Odaka Yūji, Nitani Hideaki, Inagaki Mihoko, Ōmori Yoshio, Chō Hiroshi, Ozawa Shōichi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Yamamoto Takeshi). Scr: Suzuki Keigo, Tsuji Yoshio (from a short story by Ichijō Akira). M: Hiraoka Seiji. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Nakamura Kimihiko. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 8.9.1958.

Plot: The fiancée (Watanabe) of a wealthy man begins to worry about his younger son Hiro, who shows signs of juvenile delinquency and reckless behaviour towards his girlfriend. When she attends the art exhibition of an amateur painter (Nitani), she has a bizarre vision of the boy's girlfriend being raped by an assailant in the deserted shack depicted in the painting. When the girl becomes pregnant, the older woman's concern draws her into the world of Hiro's dodgy associates, including an unstable nightclub owner (Odaka) who may be both the rapist and responsible for the girl's current pregnancy. She is sexually attracted to both the painter and the ne'er-do-well, but as it turns out, it is the upstanding painter who is the assailant.

***Kagenaki koe*** (影なき声)/*Voice Without a Shadow*

Cast: Nitani Hideaki, Minamida Yōko, Takahara Toshio, Shishido Jō, Ashida Shinsuke, Kaneko Nobuo, Noro Keisuke, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Iwai Kaneo). Scr: Akimoto Ryūta, Saji Kan (based on the novel by Matsumoto Seichi). M: Hayashi Hikaru. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. Japan, 22.10.1958.

Plot: Switchboard operator Asako (Minamida) hears a murder on the telephone but cannot convince the authorities. Asako loves a reporter (Nitani) but marries a businessman (Takahara) who becomes connected with shady underworld character Hamazaki (Shishido) and his dubious connections (Kaneko, Ashida). Once Asako realizes Hamazaki was the murderer on the phone, he ends up dead and her husband is arrested. With help of the reporter, she tracks down the real murderer.

## 1959

***Raburetaa*** (らぶれたあ)/*Love Letter*

Cast: Tsukuba Hisako, Machida Kyosuke, Nagai Franku aka Frank Nagai. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Ishii Koichi (based on a novel by Matsuura Takeo). M: Mamiya Yoshio. Ph: Kakita Isamu. Pd: Yagyū Kazuo. Japan, 15.1.59.

Plot: A young pianist at an Osaka nightclub, Kozue (Tsukuba), has exchanged love letters for years with a man she met once in the mountains. The letters have now mysteriously stopped, and the nightclub owner (Nagai) continues to offer his affections, but she is profoundly unmoved. The two agree that she must visit her one-time lover to find closure. Once there, she finds him loving but surprisingly different in some respects. It turns out that the man she has found is the brother of her dead lover (played by the same actor, Machida). The brother was responsible for most of the love letters. Shocked, Kozue runs back to Osaka where a decision looms as to which of her suitors she will accept.

***Ankoku no ryoken***(暗黒の旅券)/Passport to Darkness

Cast: Hayama Ryōji, Tsukuba Hisako, Shiraki Mari, Okada Masumi, Sawa Tamaki, Ashida Shinsuke, Kondō Hiroshi, Noro Keisuke. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Takaiwa Hajime (based on the short story by Washio Saburō). M: Kosugi Taichirō, Kawaba Koichi. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. Ed: Suzuki Akira. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 19.5.59.

Plot: A television variety show highlights the marriage of jazz trombone player Ryōji (Hayama) and his quickly acquired young bride (Sawa), even paying for their honeymoon. But she disappears before the train even departs the station. The confused trombonist becomes desolate and drunk, but later finds that his wife was in fact strangled upon her return to their home. Under suspicion, Ryōji plunges into a hidden Shinjuku underworld of drugs, sleaze and corruption in search of the murderer; hazy memories of a certain bar, which he visited when he was drunk seem to hold the key. It turns out his wife was involved with covert heroin smugglers, and with the help of a sympathetic woman (Okada) and a conflicted nightclub singer (Shiraki), a businessman-cum-heroin wholesaler (Kondō) is revealed as the murderer.

***Suppedaka no nenrei*** (素っ裸の年齢)/Age of Nudity aka *The Naked Age*

Cast: Akagi Keihachirō, Hidari Boziken, Hori Kyōko, Fujimaki Saburō, Takahara Toshio, Tamamura Shuntarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Sasai Hideo). Scr: Seijun Suzuki, Terada Nobuyoshi. M: Watanabe Michiaki. Ph: Fujioka Kumenobu. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 8.9.1959.

Plot: The fast lives of motorcycle-riding delinquent teens at a coastal resort which attracts all sorts, including a sage hobo (Hidari). One teen Ken (Akagi) leads a gang of younger compatriots who like to gather in an abandoned U.S. military barracks along with Ken's lover (Hori). The hero dreams of being a sailor, and in financial desperation attracts trouble for the gang by pulling a scam on a local *yakuza* operation. Ken celebrates his loot, but his girlfriend is frightened and leaves him, just as one of his gang brothers (Fujimaki) makes off with the moeny. Ken pursues him by motorcycle but, in an excess of speed, falls to his death off the high cliffs.

## 1960

***Jūsangō taihisen yori: sono gosōsha wo nerae*** (13号待避線よりその護送車を狙え)/Take Aim at the Police Van aka *Target: Prison Truck from Sector 13*

Cast: Mizushima Michitarō, Shiraki Mari, Watanabe Misako, Ozawa Shōichi, Ashida Shinsuke, Abe Tōru, Uchida Ryōhei, Hiromatsu Saburō, Fukuda Toyo, Chō Hiroshi, Noro Keisuke. Pro: Nikkatsu (Motegi Ryōji). Scr: Sekizawa Shinichi (based on a story

by Shimada Kazuo). M: Kawabe Koichi. Ph: Shigeyoshi Mine. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 21.1.1960.

Plot: A prison guard, Tamon (Mizushima), finds himself suspended when his prison truck is hijacked: two convict are assassinated by sniper. The warden compulsively investigates, starting with the connections of another prisoner, a petty thief Gorō (Ozawa) to whom the warden is sympathetic. The trail leads to Gorō's stripper girlfriend (Shiraki), then to the escort agency to which she belongs, which is run by a woman, Yuko (Watanabe), in place of her ailing father (Ashida). A prostitute is shot by an arrow as Tamon investigates. It turns out that the agency's shady lieutenant (Abe) and his associates are undercutting the madam by taking orders from a mysterious crime lord, Akiba. Akiba is responsible for the murders and is operating an illicit ring of teenaged girls beneath the 'respectable' agency. Goro is working for them but he and his girlfriend get shot when the latter impulsively tries to communicate with Tamon. Tamon corners the unknown Akiba and his gang in a train yard- the crime lord turns out to be Yuko's own ageing, 'respectable' father. Though horrified, she impulsively tries to defend him from the police; but as he tries to escape his foot gets caught in a split rail and he is run over by a train.

***Kemono no nemuri*** (けものの眠り / *Sleep of the Beast*)

Cast: Nagato Hiroyuki, Ashida Shinsuke, Yamaoka Hisano, Yoshiyuki Kazuko, Kusanagi Kōjirō, Kusunoki Yūko, Noro Keisuke, Nishimura Kō, Ozawa Shōichi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Mizunoe Takiko). Scr: Ikeda Ichirō (based on a short story by Mura Itaru). M: Kaburagi Hajime. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Nakamura Kimihiko. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 9.4.1960.

Plot: An aged, respectable *sarariman* is innocently scammed by some *yakuza* as part of the drug deal. His life ruined, his anger boils over until he hatches a plot to infiltrate the *yakuza* headquarters and assassinate the boss. In the ensuing chaos he burns the headquarters down, commits a massacre, and commits suicide.

***Mikko 0-rain*** (密航 0 ライン) / *Undercover 0-Line* aka *Clandestine Zero Line*.

Cast: Nagato Hiroyuki, Odaka Yūji, Shimizu Mayumi, Nakahara Sanae, Takashina Kaku, Noro Keisuke, Tamamura Shuntarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Ashida Shōzō). M: Kosugi Taichirō. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 25.6.1960.

Plot: A saga of rival crime reporters. One (Nagato) is unscrupulous and exploitative, the other (Odaka) not. The former's aggressive tactics arouse the ire of a female drug madam (Nakahara); in the end, both reporters find themselves trapped aboard a freighter used by a drug-smuggling and contraband operation. The protagonists survive after much death and destruction, but the cynical reporter has not changed his ways.

***Subete ga kurutteru*** (すべてが狂ってる) / *Everything Goes Wrong* aka *Everything Goes Crazy* aka *The Madness of Youth*

Cast: Kawachi Tamio, Ashida Shinsuke, Yatsu Ryōko (aka Nezu Ryōko), Nakagawa Shinako, Naraoka Tomoko, Itō Takao, Ueno Koichi, Hatsui Kotoe. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Hohikawa Seiji (based on a short story by Ichijō Akira). M: Miho Keitarō, Maeda Norio. Ph: Hagiwara Izumi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. O: Fujiura Atsushi (asst. dir.). Japan 8.10.1960.



Plot: Jirō (Kawachi) is an angry high school graduate with no direction. He is ashamed that his mother (Naraoka) has, since the war, been the longtime mistress of a kindly but ineffectual businessman Nanbara (Ashida). As a result, Jirō almost pathologically associates femininity and sexuality with money. Nanbara treats Jirō like a son but it is no longer reciprocated. Jirō's real father was killed in the war in a 'friendly-fire' incident involving one of the tanks that Nanbara manufactures. Jirō's upstanding friends work laborious jobs for little pay and no benefits, and so, disgusted with the idea of being any kind of slave for money, he gravitates towards a criminal youth gang in the city. Always desperately in search of cash, their informal *modus operandi* is to find teen girls, seduce or sometimes rape them, and then prostitute them for cash. One girl associated with the gang, the free-spirited but guilt-ridden Tani (Nezu), is attracted to Jirō, and takes his virginity; but afterwards he responds to her with contempt and indifference. Tani's friend Etsuko is desperately looking for money for an abortion, because she does not want to tell her upstanding boyfriend, a student protest leader, about the pregnancy. Increasingly in trouble with the law, Jirō even directs Etsuko to try to sleep with, or at least blackmail, Nanbara. All this leads to a confrontation between Nanbara and Jirō. The teen savages Nanbara for his generation's failures, including responsibility for the war, but the confrontation degenerates into pure rage, and Jirō ends up beating Nanbara to death. He and Tani go on the run with a stolen car—which the hapless teen crashes, killing both of them.

***Kutabare gurentai*** (くたばれ愚連隊)/*Go to Hell Youth Gang! aka Fighting Delinquents aka Go to Hell Hoodlums!*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Hosokawa Chikako, Azuma Emiko, Kondō Hiroshi, Ozawa Eitarō, Takashina Kaku, Shimizu Mayumi, Utsumi Toppa, Kameyama Yasuhiro, Hiromatsu Saburō, Nezu Ryōko, Ozawa Naoyoshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Koi Eisei). Scr: Yamazaki Gan (based on the story by Hara Kenzaburō). M: Ōmori Seitarō. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Satani Teruyoshi. O: Nishimura Shōgorō (asst. dir.). Japan 23.11.1960.

Plot: A reckless tycoon (Kondō) kills a painter in a hit and run accident. The tough street kids who had taken the painter as an adoptive father are in dire straits. But the inept retainer (Takashina) of the ancient Matsudaira Klan of Awaji Island appears to claim that one of the kids (Wada) is the lost heir to the *daimyō* of the clan. The clan is kept together by a stern, traditionalist matriarch (Hosokawa), but as she fights to keep the young, swinging, rock'n'roll-loving hero to stay and accept his responsibilities, the two develop great affection. Unfortunately the tycoon wants to buy off the Matsudaira lands for commercial development, aided and abetted by matriarch's cowardly, swindling brother (Ozawa) and the tycoon's mistress (Azuma), who turns out to be the hero's estranged and hitherto unseen mother. The hero vows to 'win back' his mother without abandoning the clan or giving in to the corrupt cartel.

**1961**

***Tokyo kishitai aka tokyo naito*** (東京騎士隊)/*Tokyo Knights*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Shimizu Mayumi, Nezu Ryōko, Minamida Yōko, Ozawa Shōichi, Kaneko Nobuo, Azuma Emiko, Saga Zenpei, Kondō Hiroshi, Kijimi Ichirō, Yanase Shirō. M: Ōmori Seitarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Koi Eisei). M: Ōmori Seitarō. Scr: Yamazaki Gan (based on the novel by Hara Kenzaburō). Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Nakamura Kimihiko. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan 1.2.1961.

Plot: Kōji, a high school student who studied abroad in America, is thrust into the position of being a *yakuza* boss when his father, whom he thought was in the construction business, suddenly dies. Kōji would rather play soccer and study music while a rival gang naturally takes advantage of the power vacuum to horn in on the clan's territory, with the reluctant help of Kōji's unreliable lieutenant (Kaneko). Kōji is attracted to a daughter of the rival clan but it soon transpires that the rivals had his father killed. While the rival clan goes after Kōji, his love interest calls the police and her father's clan is arrested. Finally, Kōji runs away from his own family to pursue a normal life.

***Muteppodaisho*** (無鉄砲大将)/*Reckless Boss* aka *A Hell of a Guy*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Sagawa Mitsuo, Shimizu Mayumi, Ashikawa Izumi, Hayama Ryōji, Sugai Ichirō, Hatsui Kotoe, Noro Keisuke, Ozawa Shōichi, Chō Hiroshi.

Pro: Nikkatsu (Kubo Keinosuke). Scr: Nakanishi Ryūjō, Matsūra Kenrō (based on the short story by Ichijō Akira). M: Kaburagi Hajime. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Matsui Toshiyuki. O: Takeda Kazunori (asst. dir.). Japan, 16.4.1961.

Plot: Members of a high school karate club find themselves up against a band of local *yakuza* punks. One of the high schoolers, Eiji (Wada), meets and falls for Yukiyo (Ashikawa), but her boyfriend Gorō (Hayama) works, unwillingly, for a *yakuza* front corporation. The *yakuza* boss also desires Eiji's mother, a bar hostess, while a *yakuza*'s daughter falls for Eiji. Despite his jealousy, Eiji gets involved against the *yakuza* when the plot against Gorō's life. Some of the criminals are arrested for this plot, but Yukiyo is kidnapped. In rescuing her from the *yakuza* headquarters, Eiji and the Karate students are put to the test.

***Sandanjū no otoko*** aka ***shotto gan no otoko*** (散弾銃の男)/*Man With a Shotgun* aka *Man With the Hollow-Tipped Bullets*

Cast: Nitani Hideaki, Ashikawa Izumi, Odaka Yūji, Minamida Yōko, Tanaka Akio, Noro Keisuke, Gō Eiji, Sano Asao, Saga Zenpei, Pro: Nikkatsu (Iwai Kaneo). Scr: Ishii Koichi, Matsuura Takeo. M: Ikeda Masayoshi. Ph: Shigeyoshi Mine. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Satani Teruyoshi. O: Higuchi Hiromi (asst. dir.). Japan 4.6.1961

Plot: An unnamed man with a shotgun (Nitani) climbs a remote mountain with a bad reputation and gets into trouble with a lumber operation. While he plays a guitar at a rural bar, he finds that the lumber chief's mistress is wearing a pearl necklace that belonged to his own girlfriend. It transpires she has been raped and killed. He teams up with the disrespected local sheriff and the latter's sister Setsuko (Ashikawa), soon becoming sheriff himself. He contends with a smuggling cabal (led by Sano) within the lumber company which attacks the sheriff and Setsuko and even kills their own boss. The sheriff shoots back and the perpetrators are eventually killed or arrested.

***Tōge wo wataru wakai kazai*** (峠を渡る若い風)/*New Wind Over the Mountain Pass*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Morikawa Jun, Shimizu Mayumi, Hatsui Kotoe, Fujimura Arihiro, Kaneko Nobuo, Kondō Hiroshi, Aoki Tomio, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Yanagawa Takeo). Scr: Morimoto Yoshihiro, Takeda Ichirō, Takahashi Niisan (based on the novel by Himeda Yoshirō). M: Ōmori Seitarō. Ph: Isayama Saburō. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. O: Higuchi Hiromi (asst. dir.). Japan 27.8.1961.

Plot: University student Shintarō (Wada) loses his job at an underwear factory, receiving underwear instead of severance, and so he peddles them in the countryside. He encounters a traveling theatre troupe with two attractive daughters including Misako (Shimizu). He therefore gets involved with a community of show people, good and bad, and of course the local yakuza horning in. A killing occurs, the perpetrator is arrested, and Shimizu's family moves on. Shintarō does not go with them, but is filled with regret.

***Kaikyō, chi ni somete*** (海峡、血に染めて)/*Bloody Channel* aka *Blood-Red Water in the Channel*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Hayama Ryōji, Hanabusa Eriko, Hisamatsu Kōsuke, Shimizu Mayumi, Gō Eiji, Hatsui Kotoe, Yamaoka Hisano, Hijikata Hiromi, Tamamura Shuntarō  
Pro: Nikkatsu (Sasai Hideo, Ashida Shōzō). Scr: Tanada Gorō (based on stories by Ōmura Takehiro). M: Ōmori Seitarō. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Nakamura Kimihiko. O: Higuchi Hiromi (asst. dir.). Japan 1.10.1961.

Plot: Adventures of a young coast guard trainee who is posted to his own home town. There he deals with all sorts of problems, from mundane criminality to local eccentrics, but nothing so painful as being reunited with his tougher, elder brother, a sailor (Hayama) who has become linked to a smuggling operation involving the trafficking of foreign refugees. In the face of his younger brother's contempt, and after the death of a young girl, the sailor defends his brother against the horde of smugglers in an elaborate, deftly executed action set piece finale involving the pirate ship and the pursuit of the coast guard fleet.

***Hyakuman doru wo tatakidase*** (百万弗を叩き出せ)/*Million Dollar Match*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Noro Keisuke, Sawa Michiko, Kaneko Nobuo, Watanabe Misako, Yamada Goichi, Hirata Daizaburō, Abe Tōru, Tamamura Shuntarō, Saga Zenpei, Chō Hiroshi, Kiura Yūzō, Yanase Shirō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Ashida Shōzō). Scr: Itō Naohachi (from a story by Yagi Yasutarō). M: Okumura Hajime. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Nakamura Kimihiko. Japan 1.12.1961.

Plot: Two young friends Kinji and Tōkichi (Wada and Noro) leave their rural island for Tokyo, in order to pursue their dreams of being professional boxers. They almost immediately meet some yakuza who operate a gym: Tōkichi stays with the yakuza, Kinji does not. The latter sees a poster for boxing tryouts, in association with a rising pro boxer Iino (Hirata), and passes the exam. The gym's manager (Kaneko) soon taps Kinji to replace the difficult Iino. But his first match turns out to be against Tōkichi. Kinji wins, but both are troubled and drown their sorrows, while Kinji falls for the bar waitress. In the meantime Iino has become a champion. Kinji later learns that Tōkichi has attacked Iino and went to jail. Soon, Kinji fights Iino for the national title and wins. He now has a shot at world champion.

**1962**

***Hai-tein yakuza*** (ハイティーンやくざ)/*Teen Yakuza*

Cast: Kawachi Tamio, Hatsui Kotoe, Matsumoto Noriko, Sugiyama Toshio, Kayo Matsuo, Hara Keiko, Kiura Yūzō, Sano Asao, Hisamatsu Kōsuke, Yanase Shirō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Tomoda Jirō). Scr: Yoshimura Nozomi, Okuzono Mamoru. M: Ibe Harumi. Ph: Hagiwara Kenji. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Chiba Kazuhiko. O: Endō Saburō (asst. dir.). Japan, 20.6.1962.

Plot: A fatherless high school student (Kawachi) and his fatherless friend Masao (Sugiyama) live in a dangerous neighbourhood and work at a cycling track associated with the *yakuza*. He is sick of the local gangs, especially when the lame Masao is seduced into their ranks. He and several others get involved in a brawl at a Tokyo shopping arcade. When the police arrived it soon transpires that the hero has unwittingly neutralized the local *yakuza* boss. Needing to support his mother (Hatsui) and sister, he starts accepting gifts from the shopping district to protect them from the *yakuza*, in time becoming an unwitting bodyguard. But because of this he is soon arrested for ‘extortion.’ Branded as a ‘high school *yakuza*’ news item, he is ostracized by the neighbourhood that relied on him. The *yakuza* choose their moment for revenge, and force him into a knife fight with Masao. Masao repents, however, and upon his arrest betrays the *yakuza* operation to the police.

***Ore ni kaketa yatsura***(俺に賭けた奴ら)/*Those Who Bet on Me* aka *The Guys Who Bet on Me*

Cast: Wada Kōji, Hayama Ryōji, Kawachi Tamio, Shimizu Mayumi, Minamida Yōko, Shiraki Mari, Takashina Kaku, Sano Asao, Tatsuya Fuji, Hiromatsu Saburō, Yanase Shirō, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Yamamoto Takeshi). Scr: Ogawa Ei, Nakano Akira. M: Ōmori Seitarō. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takenobu. O: Higuchi Hiromi (asst. dir.). Japan, 9.12.1962.

Plot: A truck driver (Wada) has an overweening ambition to be a pro boxer. But he and his trainer (Hayama) and their buddies have to contend, in typical fashion, with low-level *yakuza* enforcers harassing the local gym. Complications ensue involving the *yakuza* culture of fight gambling leading up to the hero’s big debut. In the meantime, he is also tempted by the trainer’s wife (Shiraki) while having to choose between an ex-girlfriend (Shimizu) and a nightclub singer (Minamida).

## 1963

***Tantei jimusho 23: Kutabare akutō-domo*** (探偵事務所 23 くたばれ悪党ども)/*Detective Bureau 23: Go to Hell Bastards!* aka *Detective Office 23: Damn the Villains!* aka *Detective Bureau 23: Down With the Wicked!*

Cast: Shishido Jō, Sasamori Reiko, Shin Kinzō, Kaneo Nobuo, Kawachi Tamio, Hatsui Kotoe, Sano Asao, Hoshi Naomi, Uenoyama Koichi, Kusunoki Masako, Hijikata Hiromi, Itō Toshiaki, Nomura Takashi, Chico Roland. Pro: Nikkatsu (Ashida Shōzō). Scr: Yamazaki Gan (based on the short stories of Ōyabu Haruhiko). M: Ibe Harumi. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Sakaguchi Takeharu. O: Higuchi Hiromi (asst. dir.). Japan, 27.1.1963.

Plot: A deliriously complicated hard-boiled scenario following the adventures of a tough private eye Tajima (Shishido)—aided and abetted by his inept male secretary (Hijikata) and an eccentric crime enthusiast (Hatsui)—as he is initially hired to protect an ex-con (Kawachi) who knows too much and has become a walking target. Tajima seizes the opportunity to pose as an (actually deceased) ex-con himself in order to infiltrate a murderous gang run by a wizened, impotent old fox (Shin) and involved in a smuggling operation connected to U.S. military bases. The boss is further connected to a corrupt, powerful corporate CEO. While fending off the attentions of the police, Tajima has to meet ‘his’ estranged father to convince the gang of his identity. When Tajima becomes

involved with the boss's mistress (Sasamori), whose own father, it turns out, had been killed by the boss, the two of them must escape from an underground garage set aflame.

***Yajū no seishun***/*Youth of the Beast aka Wild Youth aka Wild Beast of Youth*

Cast: Shishido Jō, Esumi Eimei, Kazuki Minako, Kobayashi Akiji, Kawachi Tamio, Shin Kinzō, Kaneko Nobuo, Watanabe Misako, Gō Eiji, Yanase Shirō, Kijima Ichirō, Shimizu Masao, Suzuki Mizuho, Kiura Yūzō, Tamamura Shuntarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Kubo Keinosuke). Scr: Yamazaki Tadaaki, Ikeda Ichirō (based on the novella *Hitokari* by Ōyabu Haruhiko). M: Okumura Hajime. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Yoshinaga Yokō. O: Watanabe Noboru (asst. dir.). Japan, 21.4.1963.

Plot: A policeman and a showgirl are dead in what is categorized as a love suicide. Meanwhile, a black-clad, violent stranger (Shishido) causes trouble in Asakusa until the crime family of Nomoto (Kobayashi), running a sleek, technologically advanced drug operation takes notice. They decide to hire him; so does the rival gang of Onodera (Shin) after he beats them all up. Soon he is playing both sides. The boss's wife (Kazuki) wants to hire him, too: to discover the identity of Nomoto's powerful '7<sup>th</sup> mistress.' The stranger, we soon learn, is Mizuno, a disgraced ex-policeman seeking to find the killer of his old partner and to redeem his reputation. He has to keep the various criminals from learning this, especially his loyal but bestial new partner Minami (Esumi). Mizuno's investigation of Nomoto leads to Nomoto's younger brother Hideo (Kawachi), a violent, unpredictable pusher who is gay and extremely sensitive about his mother, who was a prostitute during the war. Nomoto catches out his wife and beats her; he eventually catches Mizuno too, first immolating his fingernail and then stringing him up. But Onodera performs a kamikaze attack on Nomoto which frees Mizuno. Minami kills Nomoto for Mizuno's sake before dying himself. The information from the dying Nomoto leads Mizuno to Nomoto's mistress (Watanabe), who turns out to be the chief of the operation as well as the ex-wife of Mizuno's old partner. As Mizuno discovers using a tape recorder, it was she who murdered the husband and the young girl. Mizuno vengefully engineers a situation in which Nomoto Hideo attacks the mistress and slices her face. Following this act of savage vigilante 'justice,' he leaves the tape recorder for the police and flees the scene towards an uncertain future.

***Akutarō*** (悪太郎)/*The Bastard aka The Young Rebel aka Bad Tarō aka The Unimaginable One*

Cast: Yamauchi Ken, Izumi Masako, Tashiro Midori, Ashida Shinsuke, Noro Keisuke, Sugiyama Hajime, Sano Asao, Takamine Mieko. Pro: Nikkatsu (Takagi Masayuki). Scr: Kasahara Ryōzō (based on the novel by Tōkō Kon). M: Okumura Hajime. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Endo Saburō (asst. dir.) Japan, 21.9.1963.

Plot: A schoolboy at the beginning of the Taishō era cannot help but act on his libidinous urges. He is expelled from his school in Kobe for an aborted romance with a priest's daughter and sent to a rural school in Toyōka. There he instinctually rebels against the school authorities (Ashida), whose oppressive disciplinarian tactics fail to entirely subdue him. He martials other boys to his sexual, instinctual rebellion, while falling passionately in love with and attempting to elope with local girl Emiko (Izumi). But she will not leave her hometown to accompany him to Tokyo, where he sets off on his destiny as a writer.

***Kantō mushuku*** (関東無宿)/*Kantō Wanderer*

Cast: Kobayashi Akira, Itō Hiroko, Itō Yūnosuke, Tonoyama Taiji, Matsubara Chieko, Nakahara Sanae, Noro Keisuke, Abe Tōru, Hirata Daizaburō, Takashina Kaku, Esumi Eimei, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Asada Kenzō). Scr: Yagi Yasutarō (based on the serialised novel *Chitei no uta* by Hirabayashi Taiko). M: Ikeda Masayoshi. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Pd: Kimura Takeo. Ed: Suzuki Akira. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan 23.11.1963.

Schoolgirl Tokiko's father is Boss Izu (Tonoyama), a failing yakuza competing with his sworn brother Boss Yoshida (Abe) for a construction contract. Tokiko (Matsubara) is smitten with Izu's right-hand man Katsuta (Kobayashi) while her girlfriend Hanako (Nakahara) attaches herself to Yoshida's man Diamond Fuyu (Hirata), a hot-headed punk. But Katsuta's brutish gang brother (Noro) takes Hanako to the rural suburb of Tokyo and sells her into sexual slavery. Ashamed of his degraded gang, Katsuta vows to find her and buy her freedom, but this brings him back into contact with a woman who fascinates him, Fuyu's older sister Mrs. Iwata (Itō Hiroko) and her husband Okaru-Hachi (Itō Yūnosuke). Both are professional con artists. Katsuta appears to forcibly seduce Mrs. Iwata, but in the morning awakes in the arms of Tokiko, who may or may not have lost her virginity. Katsuta attempts to gamble against Okaru-Hachi with the money meant for Tokiko. Mrs. Iwata warns him against this but in the end helps her husband win. Later, Boss Izu pushes the frustrated Katsuta into dishonourable ways of making money. Katsuta takes a gambling job to support the Izu gang but kills two gamblers in a meaningless quarrel. Knowing that he is headed for jail, Katsuta attacks Yoshida and forces him under threat to submit to Izu. But when Katsuta places himself under arrest, Yoshida does the opposite and convinces Fuyu to assassinate Izu. When Fuyu does so he finds that Hanako, now a geisha, is Boss Izu's new lover and climbing her way up the ladder of influence. Apart from Hanako, all parties end up trapped: Mrs. Iwata in her loveless marriage and Katsuta in jail.

**1964**

***Hana to dotō*** (花と怒涛)/*The Flowers and the Angry Waves*.

Cast: Kobayashi Akira, Kubo Naoko, Matsubara Chieko, Tamagawa Isao, Kawachi Tamio, Yamauchi Akira, Takashina Kaku, Takizawa Osamu, Fukae Shōki, Saga Zenpei, Misaki Chieko, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Yanagawa Takeo). Scr: Abe Taiichi, Kimura Takeo, Suzuki Seijun (uncredited). M: Okumura Hajime. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan, 1964.02.08

Plot: Kikuchi (Kobayashi), a dissident young *yakuza*, rescues a young girl Oshige (Matsubara) in the countryside from an arranged marriage with an elderly *yakuza* boss. But what to do now? They flee to Tokyo in the 1910s where Kikuchi takes work as the lowest of construction labourers in order to support them. But his passion for the girl has long since cooled—she is now a melancholy responsibility, while sparks fly between Kikuchi and a prominent local geisha Manryū (Kubo), who tells tales of colonial Manchuria that makes Kikuchi dream of freedom and escape. Unfortunately both the *yakuza* (a hired assassin played by Kawachi) and the law (a detective, Tamagawa, who is attracted to Oshige) are closing in. Hiding his *yakuza* past, Kikuchi does his best not to get involved in the struggle between the labour union and the strike-breaking local *yakuza* boss (Takizawa), but is pulled, out of comradeship, back to violence. The proud Manryū saves him from death by submitting herself to be stripped by the *yakuza* boss.

Later, when the hired assassin proves to be involved in an uneasy truce between the *yakuza* and the construction company that employs the laborers, Kikuchi tries to intervene and gets blamed for the truce's failure. The unscrupulous family boss of the construction crew (Yamauchi) beats and disfigures him with a metal chain; and just before he learns that Oshige is pregnant, he kills the chief, who had conspired to murder him. Kikuchi tries to escape to Manchuria with Oshige but everybody, including Manryū, is following him. The assassin kills Manryū instead of Kikuchi; and as the ship is to depart, the policeman lets Kikuchi go, but only at cost of preventing Oshige from joining him. As the film ends, Kikuchi does not know what to do next.

***Nikutai no mon*** (肉体の門)/*Gate of Flesh*.

Cast: Nogawa Yumiko, Shishido Jō, Kasai Satoko, Ishii Tomoko, Tominaga Misako, Matsuo Kayō, Wada Kōji, Tamagawa Isao, Chico Roland, Noro Keisuke. Pro: Nikkatsu (Iwai Kaneo). Scr: Tanada Gorō (based on the novel by Tamurai Taijirō). M: Yamamoto Naozumi. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami. Japan, 31.5.1964.

Plot: It is the summer of 1946 in ruined, bombed-out, desolate Tokyo. Living conditions are abysmal; everyone fights for food; so many women are now prostitutes, many hocking themselves to the American occupiers and largely controlled by the local *yakuza*. Meanwhile the returned, disillusioned ex-veteran Corporal Ibuki (Shishido) successfully robs a local U.S. military base. Injured, he hides out with a clique of prostitutes run by Komasa no Sen (Kasai). Though loosely connected to the *yakuza*, this group of women has maintained a certain autonomy and independence, but at the cost of obeying Sen's ironclad rules: never sleep with a foreigner and never sleep with a man for free. To disobey is to be savagely beaten by other girls. The newest recruit is Borneo Maya (Nogawa), a young country girl who lost her brother in the war, was pimped by the *yakuza* and then raped by an American. All of the girls are happy to have Ibuki around, but it soon becomes clear that one of them will break the rules. Kimono-clad prostitute Michiko (Tominaga), suffused with nostalgia for her rural hometown and her lost husband, sleeps with Ibuki for free as well as a commuter who reminds her of her husband. Maya reluctantly conveys this secret to Sen. Michiko is beaten, her hair shaved off, and expelled. At first reluctant, the innocent Maya takes part in the beating out of jealousy, after noticing Ibuki's over-heated erotic delight at the spectacle of Michiko's nudity. In this spiral of corruption, Maya also spitefully seduces an African-American priest (Roland) who has been trying to bring her to church. Ibuki and the prostitutes share a night of drunken revels in which Ibuki drapes himself in the Red Sun and recalls his war experiences. Sen, who apparently cannot have an orgasm, becomes jealous when Ibuki calls Michiko a 'real woman.' Later that night, Maya becomes determined to sleep with the near-comatose Ibuki. They have a moment of carnal pleasure and agree to meet later to flee from Tokyo. When Sen finds out what has happened, they string up, beat, and torture Maya, who refuses to cry out. Maya survives and looks for Ibuki. But Sen and the others tell the *yakuza* that Ibuki is carrying a stash of loot and wants to make off with the penicillin stolen in the robbery. They cooperate with the American Military Police to waylay and shoot him down in the hopes of grabbing the loot from the robbery. But it turns out that what Ibuki has been carrying with him is not loot, but remembrances of a fallen friend. In an ambiguous ending underneath the American flag, Maya says in voice-over that she would rather die than try to survive in this corrupted, venal culture of Occupied Tokyo.

***Oretachi no chi ga yurusanai*** (俺たちの血が許さない)/*Our Blood Will Not Forgive*

Cast: Takahashi Hideki, Kobayashi Akira, Hase Yuri, Hosokawa Chikako, Matsubara Chieko, Ozawa Eitarō, Inoue Shobun, Takashina Kaku, Midorikawa Hiroshi, Noro Keisuke, Yanase Shirō, Hiromatsu Saburō, Chiyoda Hiroshi, Tomio Aoki, Matsuo Kayo, Chō Hiroshi, Tamamura Shuntarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Takagi Masayuki). Scr: Takemori Ryuma, Itō Michiko, Hosomi Katsuhiro (based on a novel by Matsuura Takeo). M: Suzuki Tadanori, Ikezawa Hiroshi. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan 3.10.1964.

Plot: A prominent *yakuza* (Midorikawa) is assassinated at his home. Before dying, he begs his wife (Hosokawa) not to let his two sons go the way of the *yakuza*. In this she seemingly succeeds. The grown-up Shinji (Takahashi), is a happy, dynamic good-for-nothing who skips his job whenever possible and has a propensity for brawling. One day an aged *yakuza* (Inoue) contritely confesses to the two brothers that he was their father's assassin. This inflames Shinji, and after one fist fight too many and the loss of his job, Shinji is tempted to turn to the *yakuza* way. But his brother Ryōta (Kobayashi) beats him up in anger at this idea. It turns out Ryōta is secretly a lieutenant of the *yakuza* boss Naniwada (Ozawa). Ryōta begs the boss to spare Shinji from the tattooed life, but Naniwada entices the younger sibling. In the meantime Ryōta's girlfriend (Matsubara) confesses that she is actually a plant for, and probably a mistress of, the suspicious boss. She is soon murdered, and Ryōta faces off against the boss while trying to keep Shinji from joining in and getting blood on his hands. The old assassin joins Ryōta's side, but both are shot in the melee. In the end, Shinji searches for his dying brother in vain.

**1965**

***Shunpuden*** (春婦傳)/*Story of a Prostitute* aka *Joy Girls*

Cast: Nogawa Yumiko, Kawachi Tamio, Tamagawa Isao, Ishikawa Tomiko, Imai Kazuko, Wakaba Megumi, Kaji Kentarō, Ozawa Shōichi, Hatsui Kotoe, Fujioka Jūkei, Mori Midori, Matsuo Kayo, Takashina Kaku, Izumi Hideaki, Hisamatsu Kōsuke, Chō Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Iwai Kaneo). Scr: Takaiwa Hajime (based on the novel by Tamura Taijirō). M: Yamamoto Naozumi. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masumi (asst. dir.). Japan, 27.2.1965.

Plot: Harumi leaves occupied Shanghai after savaging a lover who has jilted her. Later, we find that she has been hired as a 'comfort woman' for the Japanese army on the Manchurian front. She and the other prostitutes are expected to provide 'sexual relief' for hundreds of ordinary servicemen in the daytime, then consort and sleep with the officers at night. The adjutant to the general (Tamagawa) is attracted to Harumi but treats her with brutal rapacity. Harumi is deeply ashamed and guilty about her body's response to the adjutant's love-making; she has fantasies of rebellion against him and soon tries to enact them by having sex with the adjutant's insecure and uncomfortable orderly, Corporal Mikami (Kawachi), who is himself the victim of the adjutant's abuse. But Mikami ambivalently rejects her attentions. Harumi cannot comprehend why grown men like Mikami accept this kind of domination and abuse from those of higher rank. A demoted officer, Uno (Kaji), an intellectual and possibly a former communist, is also the constant target of abuse. Similarly, because of constant unrest, rebellion, and PLA (People's Liberation Army) activity in the Chinese village near to the base, the battalion officers inflict brutal punishment on both the Chinese as well as their own soldiers who



try to desert. Meanwhile, Harumi has grown romantically attached to Mikami, who enrages her by treating her poorly despite his obvious attraction to her. The two eventually sleep together, although Mikami is near-impotent. Meanwhile another prostitute, Shinako (Imai) has high hopes for an arranged marriage with one of the Japanese farmers in the territory, only to return, desolate, to the base after discovering that her intended is severely mentally handicapped. Clearly Harumi also dreams of safe and comfortable domesticity with the unsuitable Mikami. During a night attack by the ever-encroaching PLA, Mikami is knocked unconscious and left for dead by his comrades in the trenches. Harumi courageously rushes through the bombs to save him, and when she cannot, lies down beside him. They are both captured by the PLA and find some of the Japanese deserters amongst them, including Uno, who invites them to join the PLA and march to safety. Harumi is overwhelmingly in favour of survival, especially given their situation in re: the adjutant; but Mikami is sick with the thought of joining the Chinese rebels, and so the unsympathetic Uno abandons them in disgust. As the PLA pull out and the Japanese approach, Harumi tries to leave the fanatical and injured Mikami behind and save herself: but she is unable to abandon him. The two go back to the base where Mikami is scheduled for a quick court martial leading to execution, ostensibly because he became a 'deserter' when left for dead in the trenches; in reality the adjutant is having his revenge. Mikami has Harumi steal dynamite in order to kill himself: but the PLA attack the base. In the ensuing military disaster for the Japanese, the couple has a final chance at freedom, but as Mikami decides to blow himself up after all, Harumi inexplicably runs towards him at the last moment; they are both killed. The other prostitutes, looked after by an older Korean woman (Hatsui), decide they must try to survive this war at all costs.

***Akutarō-den: warui hoshi no shita de mo*** (悪太郎伝 悪い星の下でも) / *Stories of Bastards: Born Under a Bad Star* aka *Story of Akutarō: In Spite of an Unlucky Star*.

Cast: Yamauchi Ken, Hatsui Kotoe, Izumi Masako, Nogawa Yumiko, Hirata Daizaburō, Azuma Michie, Noro Keisuke, Benisawa Yōko, Yoko Tayōko, Tataru Jun, Chō Hiroshi, Yanase Shirō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Takagi Masayuki). Scr: Kasahara Ryūzō (based on the novel by Tōkō Kon). M: Okumura Hajime. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan, 25.8.1965.

Plot: A student named Suzuki (Yamauchi) grows up on a poor farm in Hirano, near Osaka, in the early 1930s. He delivers milk to save up for a good high school. A middle school acquaintance, Mishima (Hirata), is punished for taking an evening walk with a girl, while at the same time a member (Noro) of the school 'public morals' committee is making love with Mishima's cousin. Out of a sense of righteousness, Suzuki challenges this hypocrite to a fight. Meanwhile he is attracted to Mishima's younger sister (Izumi), but another girl, Kazuko (Nogawa) is attracted to him. He liases with the latter at an inn, only to find his own father, a compulsive gambler, beaten half to death by the local gambling syndicate. The younger Suzuki impulsively attacks them and must then go into hiding. After a long time, he tries to patch things up with Mishima's betrayed sister while rejecting Kazuko. After another inevitable scrap with the gamblers, Suzuki is arrested, then bailed, and has to quit school, thus destroying his dream of academic success. When he accidentally comes upon the wedding of the girl he loved, he repents his ways and leaves the village to find a new way of life.

***Irezumi ichidai*** (刺青一代)/*One Generation of Tattoos* aka *Tattooed Life* aka *The White Tiger Tatoo* aka *Life of a Tattooed Man*

Cast: Takahashi Hideki, Hananomoto Kotobuki, Izumi Masako, Itō Hiroko, Yamauchi Akira, Takashina Kaku, Komatsu Hōsei, Odaka Yūji, Noro Keisuke, Matsuo Kayo, Kawazu Seizaburō, Hino Michio, Chiyoda Hiroshi, Chō Hiroshi, Saga Zenpei. Pro: Nikkatsu (Sugiyama Nobutaka, Takagi Masayuki). Scr: Naoi Kinya, Hattori Hiroshi. M: Ikeda Masayoshi, Ph: Takamura Kuratarō. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan 13.11.1965.

Plot: In the 1930s, the *yakuza* have decided to rub out the killer White Fox Tetsu (Kobayashi). But Tetsu's younger brother Kenji (Hananomoto), an art student, follows his brother and shoots the would-be assassin. The bitter Tetsu must now take Kenji with him on the run; they flee to a port town in Western Japan in the hopes of getting to colonial Manchuria, but they are swindled by Yamano (Komatsu), who is both a con man and an informal agent for a Manchurian land development cartel connected to both the government and the *yakuza*. Desperately hiding his *yakuza* tattoos, Tetsu gets work with nearby construction labours with the help of a sympathetic foreman (Takashina). Tetsu shyly flirts with Midori (Izumi) the forward, indomitable sister of the company boss (Yamauchi), whom Tetsu does not trust. But it is actually the boss' company manager (Odaka) who is untrustworthy, getting payoffs from the local *yakuza* while trying to marry Midori. He tries to frame Tetsu for his own collusion with the *yakuza* but is unsuccessful. Meanwhile, though, Kenji has developed an obsession with the boss's wife (Itō), who views him bathing one day. He wants to sculpt her nude body; tensions emerge forthwith between the older couple. It turns out that the boss is an understanding soul who wants to help Tetsu, but when the manager uncovers both Kenji's attentions and Tetsu's *yakuza* past, the brothers must flee from the law. Midori wants Tetsu to stay but he tells her that he is a no good *yakuza* who cannot live a decent life. Unfortunately Yamano, who has been helping the *yakuza* boss (Kawazu) try to muscle in on the construction contract, spots Kenji on his way to see the boss's wife one last time. This leads to Kenji's death at the hands of the *yakuza*. Tetsu is now free to reveal his tattoos once more and resume the life of a killer in a stylised, operatic finale of vengeful massacre. Tetsu goes off to jail and says goodbye to Midori; at least his brother, he says, died for love.

## 1966

***Kawachi karumen*** (河内カルメン)/*Carmen from Kawachi*

Cast: Nogawa Yumiko, Wada Kōji, Kawachi Tamio, Sano Asao, Kuwayama Shōichi, Kusunoki Masako, Saga Zenpei, Miyagi Chikako, Matsuo Kayo, Hino Michio, Itō Ruriko, Ōtsuji Shirō, Noro Keisuke. Pro: Nikkatsu (Sakagami Shizuo). Scr: Miki Katsumi (based on the novel by Tōkō Kon). M: Kosugi Taiichirō. Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masumi (asst. dir.). Japan 7.2.1966.

Plot: In a rural village in the old province of Kawachi, high school girl Tsuyuko (Nogawa) is smitten with the son of the local factory owner Akira (Wada), but when he makes a pushy sexual overture one day on the road, they part—and Tsuyuko is seized and raped by two passing thugs. She finds no comfort at her family home in the mountains: her mother, in full knowledge of her defeated father, is in a superstitious and sexual thrall to a *yamabushi* (Kusayama), or traditional mountain holy man, to whom she also owes money. Tsuyuko leaves home without looking back and after an ellipsis we

discover her as a hostess in Osaka's Club Dada, where she is repulsed by the antics of the drunken *saririman*. One night she gets drunk and (apparently) sleeps with one rather pathetic and perverted middle-aged worker at a credit union, Kanzo (Sano). Her girlfriends tell her to dump him and make herself a mistress of a wealthier man, but when Kanzo foolishly loses his money and job out of obsession with her, the pitying Tsuyuko takes him in. Soon, however, she becomes attached to a modelling agency run by Yōko (Kusonoki) and is introduced to her friends, including an avant-garde painter (Kawachi). She leaves Kanzo and briefly moves in with Yōko but, as an easily shocked small town girl, is not prepared for the latter's sexual advances. She leaves a somewhat worldlier woman and begins a relationship with the painter. She hesitates to become a mistress to his patron, a worldly, elderly magnate (Saga) who is smitten with her. At this point, however, Akira re-enters her life. Estranged and somewhat impoverished, Akira dreams of getting enough money (by any means) to build his own *onsen* (hot springs resort) and Tsuyuko is sucked into his dream, until it becomes apparent that Akira has made a deal with the magnate to covertly make pornographic films of Tsuyuko. Furious and appalled, but moved by Akira's desperate situation, including entanglement with the *yakuza*, Tsuyuko appears to make love to him as requested. But the disillusion is permanent, and the next day she leaves him and all concerned in the affair. Nevertheless, the magnate soon dies and leaves a fortune to Tsuyuko. She returns home only to find the *yamabushi* sleeping with her younger sister. With no other recourse, Tsuyuko lures him to a waterfall in the hopes of pushing him in: he slips, and she lets him die. She is initially hysterical; but life goes on.

***Tokyo nagaremono*** (東京流れ者)/*Tokyo Drifter*

Cast: Watari Tetsuya, Kita Ryūji, Matsubara Chieko, Nitani Hideaki, Esumi Eimei, Kawachi Tamio, Tamagawa Isao, Chō Hiroshi, Go Eiji, Yoshida Takeshi, Hino Michio, Kiura Yūzō, Tamamura Shuntarō. Pro: Nikkatsu (Nakagawa Tetsurō). M: Kaburagi Hajime. Scr: Kawauchi Kōhan (Suzuki Seijun and Kimura Takeo, uncredited). Ph: Mine Shigeyoshi. Ed: Inouye Chikaya. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir). Japan, 10.4.1966.

Plot: Tetsu (Watari) is the tough young lieutenant of the doting, fatherly *yakuza* Boss Kurata (Kita), who has attempted to go straight. Kurata's unprincipled rival Ōtsuka (Esumi) uses this as an opportunity to steal a new office building that Kurata wants to buy from the honourable businessman Yoshii (Hino). Ōtsuka begins his reign of terror by beating up Tetsu, who is not allowed to fight back, murdering Yoshii, and attempting to kidnap Tetsu's oft-disappointed and somewhat masochistic girlfriend Chiharu (Matsubara). Tetsu manages to prevent Ōtsuka from forcing Kurata to sign over the deed to the building; but in the ensuing struggle, Kurata fires his gun on a sexually-threatening young secretary rather than Ōtsuka. With both sides fearing exposure for these murders, Kurata's slippery lawyer (Chō) proposes a truce on the condition that Tetsu leaves town for the sake of peace. Tetsu therefore drifts away from his home and his girl out of loyalty to Kurata. In snow-bound Yamagata, Tetsu stays with the local *oyabun*, a Kurata ally, but is hunted down by assassin 'Viper' Tatsuya (Kawachi). Their presence in Yamagata incites a local gang war that causes suffering to both Tetsu and his patrons. Tetsu's life is saved by an ex-*yakuza* drifter who was betrayed by Ōtsuka, nicknamed 'Shooting Star' (Nitani). Shooting Star, who seems drawn to the unfriendly Tetsu, warns the younger man not to trust his *yakuza* bosses, including Kurata. Sure enough, Kurata inexplicably accepts a lousy deal with Ōtsuka that grants him the office building in return for killing Tetsu and pimping Chiharu out to Ōtsuka. After Tetsu survives an

assassination attempt from Kurata's reluctant associate in Sasebo (Tamagawa), the vengeful hero returns to Tokyo and, in an orgy of violence, wipes out both the Kurata and Ōtsuka gangs. Kurata attempts to kill Tetsu and failing that slashes his own wrists. The stage is set for Tetsu to reclaim Chiharu and Kurata's gang: but instead, Tetsu callously spurns Chiharu, declaring that is it unseemly for a drifter to walk with a woman, and walks off. Now a loner by choice, Tetsu walks away from the Neon haze of Tokyo.

***Kenka erejii*** (けんかえれじい)/*Elegy For Violence* aka *Fighting Elegy* aka *Born Fighter* aka *Elegy for a Quarrel*

Cast: Takahashi Hideki, Asano Junko, Kawazu Yūsuke, Kataoka Mitsuo, Onda Seijirō, Tamagawa Isao, Miyagi Chikako, Sano Asao, Noro Keisuke, Katō Takeshi, Chō Hiroshi, Kayama Aiko, Hino Michio, Matsuo Kayo, Midorigawa Hiroshi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Ōtsuka Kazu). Scr: Shindō Kaneto, Suzuki Seijun (uncredited) (based on a novel by Suzuki Takashi). M: Yamamoto Naozumi. Ph: Hagiwara Kenji. Ed: Tanji Matsuo. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan, 9.11.1966.

Plot: It is the mid-1930s. Kiroku (Takahashi) is a Catholic student at Okayama Middle School who cannot seem to stop fighting with his peers. Perhaps his violent energy has something to do with his hormones and his lust for Michiko, the daughter of the innkeeper with whom he lodges. Kiroku idealizes Michiko's virginal purity but has no outlet for his sexual attraction other than masturbating—sometimes with the help of Michiko's piano. At school, he joins the OSMS group, basically a patriotic and mock-military student association. The hypocritical and cowardly club president Takuan (Kawazu) manipulates the others into doing his fighting for them. One day he sees Kiroku with Michiko and denounces Kiroku for being with a girl. The stage is set for an all-out-war between Kiroku and the club, using such savage home-made weapons as shoe cleats. Kiroku is aided by another Catholic student, the self-proclaimed master of martial arts Turtle (Kataoka), who 'trains' him in painful endurance. With Turtle encouraging his rebellious, violent streak, soon Kiroku is duelling with the local military instructor. The school brings in Kiroku's well-to-do father (Onda) to reign him in, but the father can't seem to help indulging what he sees as a youthful competitive spirit. In response to escalating punishment, Turtle tries to reason with the school administrators but ends up shooting what appears to be dried beans at them. Kiroku is expelled and packed off to a school in distant, rural Aizu, which is proud of its samurai tradition. Soon Kiroku is challenging the entire kendo team, and their night time guerrilla battle resembles actual warfare. The school headmaster (Tamagawa) should punish Kiroku, but also cannot help condoning his fierceness. 'One must be a man above all,' he shrugs. One winter day, Kiroku glimpses the silent, grim ultranationalist revolutionary Kita Ikki, and this seems somehow to change him. Michiko travels across the country to visit Kiroku, confessing to him that she loves him but believes herself to be frigid. The 'mature' Kiroku now rejects attachment to a woman as detrimental to his martial spirit. As Michiko trudges home in the snow she appears to be knocked down by an implacable column of soldiers on their way to China. Kiroku, meanwhile, learns of the 1936 Tokyo revolt of young ultranationalist officers inspired by Kita, and is himself inspired to join the biggest fight of all: the war.

1967

***Koroshi no rakuin*** (殺しの烙印)/*Branded to Kill*

Cast: Shishido Jō, Annu Mari, Ogawa Mariko, Nanbara Kōji, Minami Hiroshi, Tamagawa Isao, Yamatoya Atsushi. Pro: Nikkatsu (Iwai Kaneo). Scr: 'Guryū Hachirō' (Suzuki, Yamatoya Atsushi, Kimura Takeo, Sone Chūsei, Tanaka Yōzo, Okata Yutaka, Yamaguchi Seiichirō). M: Yamamoto Naozumi. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue; Ed: Tanji Matsuo; Pd: Kawahara Sukezō; O: Kuzuu Masami (asst. dir.). Japan, 15.6.1967.

Plot: Goro Hanada (Shishido) is ranked as Japan's Number 3 assassin. He returns from his honeymoon to a meeting with his boss, Yabuhara (Tamagawa), who represents the shadowy 'Organisation'. During the meeting, Hanada's wife Mami (Ogawa) starts cheating with the boss, while Hanada indulges in his addiction to the smell of boiled rice, which sexually arouses him. Hanada's assignment is to escort a mysterious passenger to Nagano. Hanada's partner Kasuga (Minami) has lost his ranking due to alcohol and women. During the trip, Kasuga is killed when he loses his nerve, but Hanada manages to kill the No. 2 assassin, and his mysterious passenger (Nanbara) reveals himself to be an excellent shot. On the way back, Hanada is picked up by Misako (Annu Mari), a mysterious woman who kills birds and claims that she wants to die. Back at home, Hanada violently makes love to Mami but thinks of Misako. Hanada carries out three ingenious assassinations for Yabuhara. Misako hires him to do a fourth job, but he misses the target when a butterfly settles on his gunsights. Hanada's career is now in ruins, and when he returns home his wife shoots him and burns the house down. Wounded, he staggers to Misako's apartment, a nightmarish place covered with dead butterflies. Hanada tries to rape Misako, but the latter is anything but defenceless, and both of them attempt to kill each other. Although Misako says she loves Hanada, the latter panics and escapes from her, and is devastated by his inability to kill Misako: has he lost his professional detachment? Hanada tracks down his wife Mami, who reveals that the Organisation ordered her to shoot him, and that all the assassinations are linked to an international diamond smuggling scheme with political implications. Hanada murders his wife, but finds that someone else has killed the boss, Yabuhara. Hanada then discovers that Misako was kidnapped and tortured by the Organisation for failing to kill Hanada. Hanada fights and kills five Organisation operatives, but then comes face to face with his former passenger, who turns out to be the phantom Number One Killer. Over several days, the two try to kill each other with sniper rifles, and Hanada begins to crack under the pressure of Number One's cat and mouse game. Eventually, Hanada overcomes his emotions and fights back, desiring to become Number One himself. Finally they agree to meet in empty boxing ring to finish the duel. Hanada and Number One shoot each other, but Hanada accidentally shoots the bandaged, invalid Misako when she appears on the scene. Hanada falls out of the boxing ring, whether alive or dead we cannot tell.

1977

***Hishū monogatari***/A Tale of Sorrow aka A Story of Sorrow and Sadness aka Sad Story

Cast: Shiraki Yōko, Harada Yoshio, Enami Kyōko, Okada Masumi, Sano Shūji, Asao Koike, Noro Keisuke, Tamagawa Isao, Wada Kōji, Nakaya Noboru, Ashihara Kuniko, Matsuo Kayo, Shishido Jō. Pro: Shōchiku (Asada Kenzō, Kajiwara Ikki, Kawano Yasuhiro, Fujioka Yutaka, Nomura Yoshiki). Scr: Yamatoya Atsushi (based on a manga

by Kajiwara Ikki). M: Miho Keitarō, Tomi Taiichirō. Ph: Mori Masaru. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Ph: Kikukawa Yoshie. O: Saitō Nobuyuki (asst. dir.). Japan 21.5.1977.

Plot: A corporate conglomerate hits upon the idea of creating a female celebrity golfer as a way of selling a new line of female sporting clothes. They recruit down-and-out sports agent Miyake (Harada) for *cherchez la femme*. He selects the young, unknown pro-golfer Reiko (Shiraki), who lives with her kid brother. Working under the best hired trainers and professionals, Reiko struggles to better her game and prepare for a major golfing tournament in just a short time. But her faith and attraction to her agent supplements her innate self-confidence and work ethic. She does well in the tournament and wins the next one, albeit demonstrating a certain undue arrogance; she finally sleeps with Miyake. The process of turning into a media celebrity now begins. She poses on a golf course in a bikini and appears on endless television talk shows, which seem to devolve into beauty contests. She gathers a fan base. But she begins to show discontent with her endlessly profit-spinning corporate managers, and the discontent finds a somewhat perverse outlet: an overenthusiastic fan/neighbour (Enami) whose attentions Reiko had high-handedly rebuffed. During a drunken car ride home with Miyake, in which he tries to force her to accept an international game with a European champion, Miyake hits the same neighbour and injures her leg. Since this could put an end to Reiko's career, the neighbour can now blackmail Reiko into all sorts of favours, of which open access to her house is just the start. Reiko takes no rational action to escape this woman's clutches, almost as if her suffering is a masochistic rebellion against her patriarchal bosses. When the neighbour makes a shambles of Reiko's talk show appearance, Miyake is asked to intercede but is ineffectual; moreover Reiko has lost all trust in him. Her kid brother suffers a messy upbringing as well; moreover his life seems to take place in a sort of time warp wherein his childhood takes on the appearance of a pre-war childhood. Reiko continues to allow her tormentor, and now the local neighbours as well, to use and trash her home and to physically abuse her person. At a hellish party, in which the neighbour admits that she threw herself in front of Reiko's car on purpose, the locals and their children throw Reiko to the floor and strip her nude. When they leave, the neighbour prostitutes Reiko to her own husband. As Reiko, who has now reached the bottom of celebrity debasement, sleeps with the husband wilfully, the neighbour begins to get jealous of Reiko's attractiveness. But Reiko's kid brother finally has had enough of these perversities and suddenly kills everyone in the house, including not only the neighbours but an 'innocent' stalker/fan (Noro) who happens to be there as well. As if there is an unspoken pact between the two siblings in which Reiko must die as a martyr to her vicious society, her brother shoots her and then torches the house.

## 1980

### *Zigeunerweisen* (ツイゴイネルワイゼン)

Cast: Fujita Toshiya, Ōtani Naoko, Harada Yoshio, Ōkusu Michiyo, Tamagawa Isao, Maro Akaji, Kimura Yūki, Makishi Kisako, Sasaki Sumie, Tamaki Nagamasa. Pro: Cinema Placet aka Cinema Purasetto (Arato Genjirō). Scr: Tanaka Yōzō (based on the novella *Sarasate no ban* and the story 'Yamakata bōshi' by Uchida Hyakken). M: Kawachi Kaname. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Kamiya Nobutake. Pd: Kimura Takeo, Tada Yoshito. O: Yamada Sumio (asst. dir.). Japan, 1.4.1980.

Plot: A woman washes up dead on a Kamakura beach, and a wandering intellectual named Nakasago (Harada) is implicated. He tells his friend, the narrator/protagonist Aochi (Fujita) that she committed suicide. As the two of them hang about Kamakura, Nakasago aggressively courts a geisha named Oine (Ōtani), whose resistance soon breaks down. But, a year later, Aochi finds that Nakasago has married a woman named Sono who is Oine's virtual double. Nakasago abandons Sono just after they have a child. Because of this, Aochi visits Sono at his friend's house. He has an uncanny experience, as if being haunted either by Sono herself, or by something or someone that is haunting both of them. Months pass, but Aochi is bothered by the absent presence of Nakasago: the strange behaviour of his ultra-modern wife (Ōkusu) and the testimony of a dying sister-in-law lead Aochi to fear that Nakasago is sleeping with his wife. Months later it transpires that Sono has died during an outbreak of fever. Oine is now taking care of Sono's child; soon Nakasago himself apparently has died on one of his wanderings, although Aochi seems to meet him again. One day a surprisingly cold Oine visits Aochi to tell him that Nakasago's daughter is communicating with Nakasago in her sleep, and that the latter had demanded some books and records that Aochi once borrowed (including the titular record by Pablo Sarasate). Aochi denies it, but eventually is compelled to visit Nakasago's house once more; while there, he cannot find the child and cannot be sure whether Oine's personality and memories correspond to Oine or Sono. Leaving, Aochi meets Nakasago's child on a bridge. She tells him that Nakasago is alive and he, Aochi, is really dead. Aochi tries to turn around, but only finds himself confronting the child again, this time on a pier full of votive candles, with a wreathed funeral boat lying underneath.

1981

**Kagerō-za**(陽炎座)/*Mirage Theatre* aka *Heat-Haze Theatre*

Cast: Matsuda Yūsaku, Ōkusu Michiyo, Nakamura Katsuo, Kaga Mariko, Kusuda Eriko, Harada Yoshio, Ōtomo Ryūtarō, Azuma Emiko, Itō Hiroko, Tamagawa Isao, Maro Akaji, Sano Asao, Esumi Eimei, Kiki Kirin. Pro: Cinema Placet aka Cinema Puraseto (Arato Genjirō). Scr: Tanaka Yōzō (based on the short stories *Shunchū* and *Shunchū gokoku* by Izumi Kyōka). M: Kawachi Kaname. Ph: Nagatsuka Kazue. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Ikeya Noriyoshi. O: Kuzuu Masami (directorial collaboration), Shiraishi Kōichi (asst. dir.). Japan, 29.8.1981.

Plot: *Shinpa* playwright Matsuzaki has a series of surreal encounters with a tycoon (Nakamura), and two women near a hospital. Sometime later he is invited to meet his patron—the same businessman, Tamawaki. One of the women turns out to be Tamawaki's recently-married second wife Shinako (Ōkusu), who Matsuzaki appears to make love to. The other woman is apparently Tamawaki's first wife Oine (Kusuda), who, according to Tamawaki, was bedridden at the time Matsuzaki claims to have encountered her, and is now deceased. Matsuzaki is drawn into Tamawaki's world of decadence and wealth, at least as a passive observer. But he also receives a mysterious communication from Shinako asking him to come to Kanazawa and join her in a double suicide. Still knowing next to nothing about Shinako and her motives, Matsuzaki is incredulous but also fascinated. Despite much intimation that Tamawaki knows about this affair (or intended affair) and that Matsuzaki is in danger, the playwright goes to Kanazawa. On the road he meets an itinerant anarchist (Harada) who has kidnapped a wealthy socialite as a political statement, but now has become attached to her. Matsuzaki attends an anarchist ceremony in which the participants solemnly pass around traditional clay

figures, then look inside the clay figures to find smaller, obscene figures inside. The anarchists then smash the clay figures. The chief anarchist (Ōtomo) tells Matsuzaki that his son has died mysteriously: in the process of jealously spying on his girlfriend, the son saw her meet another man who turned out to be himself, his own double: this, the anarchist says, is a form of death. Matsuzaki has an uncanny erotic encounter with Oine; things come to a head when he finds Tamawaki and Shinako at a local amateur theatre production. The children who put on the performance mysteriously begin to reveal Tamawaki's past through staged recreations: for instance, they reveal how he drove Oine insane by forcing her, a German woman, to take on the eye and hair-colour of a Japanese woman; and how Shinako has tried to rebel against the tyrannical businessman through adultery with Matsuzaki. Confused by these uncanny happenings, Tamawaki urges Matsuzaki to commit suicide with Shinako and leaves. During the performance a mysterious female deity seems to emerge who demands Shinako's life. Shinako leaps from the stage, destroying it entirely, and seems to drown herself in a tub of water. Matsuzaki fights the deity in order to reach Shinako and also seems to plunge himself in the water. But is Matsuzaki dead or alive? We see him as he converses with various characters, to whom he explains that it was Tamawaki who died with Shinako, not himself. However, nothing is certain: in the last scene, Matsuzaki sees himself (his double) join with Shinako, the very scenario of death that the anarchist had imparted to him.

## 1985

### ***Kapone ōi ni naku*** (カポネ大いに泣く) / *Capone Cries a Lot*

Cast.: Hagiwara Kenichi, Tanaka Yūko, Sawada Kenji, Emoto Akira, Laurie Berys, Chuck Wilson, Randy Rice, Kiki Kirin, Bengaru. Pro: K enterprise; Nippon Columbia/System Japan/Shōchiku (distributor) (Nakamura Kenichi, Okuyama Kazuyoshi). Scr: Kimura Takeo, Yamatoya Atsushi (based on the novel by Kajiyama Toshiyuki). M: Inouye Takayuki. Ph: Fujisawa Junichi, Takada Akira. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo, Maruyama Yūji. O: Takahashi Masaharu (asst. dir.). Japan, 16.2.1985.

Plot: In the 1930s, a geisha (Tanaka) who was involved in an adulterous affair is forced to wear the tattoo of an octopus on her back as a kind of punishment. She develops a love with a young touring actor (Hagiwara) who wants to be a *naniwabushi* performer. They run away from those who claim to possess them and take ship to San Francisco. Despite the actor's desire to perform, the couple's lack of funds shortly determine that they become a beggar and a prostitute, respectively. They meet a third immigrant Gorō (Sawada) who wants to help them by staging an act at a posh nightclub; *naniwabushi* does not go down well, so the actor does variety acts dressed up as a samurai. Later, Al Capone's Chicago operation wants to move in on their new home, San Francisco's Chinatown, where Chinese and Japanese are mingled together. Unfortunately the three immigrants are involved in their own, local, illicit liquor production. Their downward path against this opposition takes them to Chicago, where the geisha dies in a car accident, Gorō dies from eating poisonous *fugu*, and the actor performs *seppuku* with the help of his American girlfriend.

***Rupan sansei: Babiron no ōgon densetsu*** (ルパン三世 バビロンの黄金伝説) / *Lupin the Third: Golden Legend of Babylon*. D: Suzuki Seijun, Yoshida Shigetsugu. Voice cast: Yamada Yasuo, Kobayashi Kiyoshi, Masuyama Eiko, Naya Gorō, Inoue Makio,



Katsusei Asaki, Shimazu Saeko, Shiozawa Toki, Carousel Maki aka Karūseru Maki. Pro: Tōhō/Nippon Television/Yomiuri Telecasting (Takei Hidehiko, Sano Kazushichi, Katayama Tetsuo). Scr: Yamatoya Atsushi, Urasawa Yoshio, Monkey Punch (based on the mangas of Monkey Punch). M: Ōno Yūji, Suzuki Seiji. Ph: Ishigaki Tsutomu. Ed: Tsurubuchi Masatoshi. O: Aoki Yūzō, Owashi Hidetoshi, Yanagino Tatsuo (animation directors).  
Japan, 13.7.1985.

Plot: Another animated adventure of master thief *Rupan sansei*/Lupin III, his gang of compatriots, his amorous rival Fujiko, and pursuing police detective Zenigata. This time Lupin is in New York City chasing up rumours that clay tablets have surfaced, somewhere in the city, indicating the location of the original (golden) Tower of Babel. A homeless old lady appears to leave Lupin a candlestick and a Babylonian word as clues to the mystery. Meanwhile, Zenigata has assembled a squadron of international policewomen to locate and arrest Lupin. Back in Europe on the Orient Express, Lupin and the police suffer a helicopter attack from the Italian mafia, led by the son of Lucky Luciano, who also wants to find the tower; Lupin escapes. His visions of the old woman lead to the Middle East and to a statue of a winged lion, which Fujiko snatches away from him. Eventually Lupin must return to New York to help Fujiko escape the mafia. It turns out that aliens are also interested in finding the tower; they travel by means of Halley's Comet and previously tried to make off with the tower, for mysterious reasons, in ancient times; but the alien pick-up operation fumbled and the tower fell back to Earth to rest under what is now Madison Square Garden. Lupin chases the airborne tower but the gold is ground up and destroyed in the atmosphere, where it will stay.

## 1991

### *Yumeji* (夢二)

Cast: Sawada Kenji, Mariya Tomoko, Harada Yoshio, Ōkusu Michiyo, Miyagi Chikako, Miyazaki Masumi, Hirota Reona, Bandō Tamasaburō, Hasegawa Kazuhiko, Yo Kimiko, Maro Akaji. Pro: Cinema Placet, Arato Genjirō (Akiyama Michio, Son Kahō). Scr: Tanaka Yōzō. M: Umebayashi Shigeru, Kawachi Kaname. Ph: Fujisawa Junichi. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Ikeya Noriyoshi. O: Saisha Yasushi (asst. dir.). Japan, 13.4.1991.

Plot: Indescribable fantasia on the life of the amorous watercolourist and poet Yumeji Takehisa, centering around a health visit to mountains of Kanazawa. It begins with what seems to be a dream of Yumeji killed in a pistol duel by a strange man. Then, in Kanazawa, he desires to paint or seduce (for he cannot tell the difference) an uncanny 'widow' (Mariya) whom he sees on a lake. Her husband is apparently dead by a mad killer (Hasegawa) hiding in the mountains who may or may not have been the widow's lover. But soon the husband Wakiya (Harada) turns up again, living the high life in the small village and drawing Yumeji into his revels. But Yumeji is by now obsessed with the widow, despite the danger of the lurking killer. The latter eventually accepts punishment for the seemingly 'impossible' murder. Wakiya eventually departs by train—a strange behaviour for a ghost—while his widow disappears just as Yumeji is about to possess her. The melancholy painter departs Kanazawa.

1993

***Kekkon*** (結婚)/*Marriage*

D: Suzuki Seijun, Nagao Hiroshi, Onchi Hideo. Cast: Harada Yoshio, Harada Kiwako, Naitō Taketoshi, Matusbara Chieko, Bengaru, Jinnai Taketori, Natori Yūko, Musaka Naomasa, Nakai Kiichi, Satō Koichi, Hasegawa Hatsunori, Takeuchi Tōru, Kawakami Mieko, Washio Isako, Ishikawa Kimiko, Toni Pedecine. Pro: Seshīru/ Shōchiku (Masaoka Dōitsu, Nakagawa Shigehiro, Nabeshima Tashio, Takeda Shigeru). Scr: Urasawa Yoshio. M: Inoue Takayuki. Ph: Fujisawa Junichi. Ed: Uraoka Keiichi. Pd: Ikeya Noriyoshi. O: Satō Yoshio (asst. dir.)  
Japan 24.4.1993.

Plot: A triptych of three short films in which Suzuki directs the first segment. A vain actor (Jinnai) agrees to a marriage proposal in the hopes that the news will boost his popularity. But it turns out to be a sham as his intended (Harada Kiwako) is in a long-term affair with another actor which all parties are concerned to conceal. The enraged groom wants to cancel the marriage but it is too late. However on the marriage day it is not the intended bride who shows up but, by some inexplicable cause, a loving high school sweetheart whom the actor had left behind.

2001

***Pisutoru opera*** (ピストルオペラ)/*Pistol Opera*

Cast: Esumi Makiko, Yamaguchi Sayoko, Hira Mikijirō, Nagase Masatoshi, Kiki Kirin, Hanae Kan, Jan B. Woudstra, Sawada Kenji, Watanabe Kensaku, Kato Haruko, Aoki Tomio, Morishita Yoshiyuki, Tanaka Yōji. Pro: Shōchiku/Dentsu/JVC/TV Tokyo/Ogura Jimsho Co. (Ogura Satoru, Katashima Ikki). Scr: Itō Kazunori, Guryū Hachizuke; Kimura Takeo and Suzuki Seijun (uncred.). M: Tezuma Masafumi, Uemura Shūta (musical directors). Ph: Maeda Yonezō. Ed: Suzuki Akira. Pd: Kimura Takeo. O: Higuchi Shinji (special effects); Ihara Shinji (asst. dir.), Nagamachi Kanako (costumes). Japan 27.10.2001.

Plot: Stray Cat (Esumi) is The Guild's No. 3 assassin. She receives contracts from the veiled Guild agent Uekyo (Yamaguchi). A young girl (Hanae) seems to be present whenever she kills someone. Stray Cat lives a solitary, independent life in the country with an elderly woman (Kiki). Soon she seems to be receiving contracts to kill the other, eccentric Guild assassins, and the agent wants to hire her to kill the unseen No. 1 Killer 'Hundred Eyes.' Stray Cat's competitiveness is recklessly encouraged by the aged, crippled Hanada Gorō (Hira), who survived his travails in 1967 but is a wreck of his former self. The electric red dot that signifies a sniper target starts appearing everywhere in Stray Cat's path: No. 1 is closing in. A courteous sharpshooter in black (Nagase) appears claiming to be No. 1. The two eventually have a duel in the forest and Stray Cat kills him. But the red dot does not disappear... Hanada claims that No. 1 is still alive and that he/she has a list of the real names of all the killers. Stray Cat and her diminutive follower seem to drift until she confronts the agent Uekyo as the *real* Hundred Eyes. Uekyo uses the young girl (and other street girls presumably) as her 'eyes'; they, mysteriously, even share her name. Uekyo grew bored and created a competition amongst the Guild assassins, waiting to challenge the last survivor (Stray Cat). In monologue on the street, Uekyo confesses that at first she was appalled by the Americanization of Japan evident in post-war films, but then had a vision in which all

national flags, Japanese, American, etc., were all ‘bloody, muddy, and shitty.’ In an unidentifiable location that seems like a time-warp or a metamorphosing museum full of mobile historical and cultural artefacts, Uekyo is killed by Stray Cat. The latter is now No. 1, and so Hanada makes a pathetically failed attempt, in front of Mt. Fuji, to kill her. Stray Cat tells him piteously that he is not a ‘pro,’ and promptly shoots herself.

## 2005

### ***Operetta tanuki goten*** (オペレッタ狸御殿) / *Princess Raccoon* aka *Raccoon Palace*

Cast: Zhang Ziyi, Odagiri Jō, Hira Mikijirō, Yakushimaru Hiroko, Saori Yuki, Takahashi Gentarō, Yamamoto Tarō, Papaya Suzuki, Ichikawa Miwako, Onoe Murasaki, Sasai Eisuke.

Pro: Ogura Jimsyo Co./Dentsu/Eisei Gekijo/Geneon/Nippon Herald/Shōchiku (Ogura Satoru, Katashima Ikki), Suzuki Seijun (exec.). Scr: Urasawa Yoshio. M: Ōshima Michiru, Shirai Yoshiaki. Ph: Maeda Yonezō. Ed: Itō Nobuyuki. Pd: Ataka Norifumi. O: Itō Sachiko (costumes); Tsugi Isao (make-up design); Suenaga Ken (asst. dir.). Japan 28.5.2005.

Plot: A musical revue version of a famous fairy tale. A vain king of ancient Yamato, Azuchi (Hira), loathes his son (Odagiri) for his beauty. Failing to have him assassinated, Azuchi banishes the prince instead. The prince strays into the sacred and supernatural woods beneath Mt. Kiraisu, where he encounters a beautiful woman speaking a strange tongue (Mandarin). They share a romantic reverie in the woods. She is a princess (Zhang) of the raccoon (*tanuki*) palace, and their attraction is looked on with dismay by the court. Eventually the prince is imprisoned by the raccoons; the princess and her handmaidens save him, but even her loyal followers demand that the lovers be separated. She falls ill in despair, and the prince journeys up the mountain to find the ‘Frog of Paradise’ to heal her. However the star-crossed lovers are destined to die for their passion.